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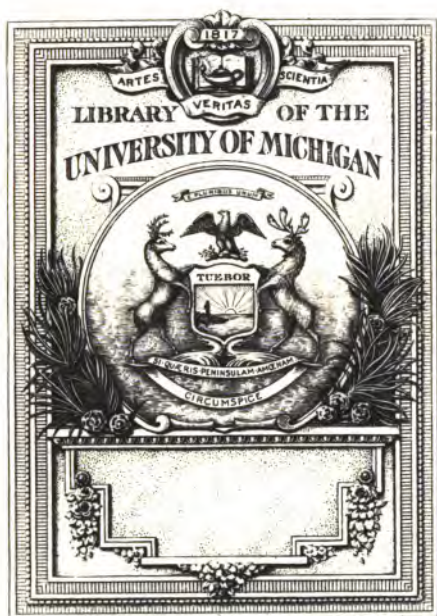
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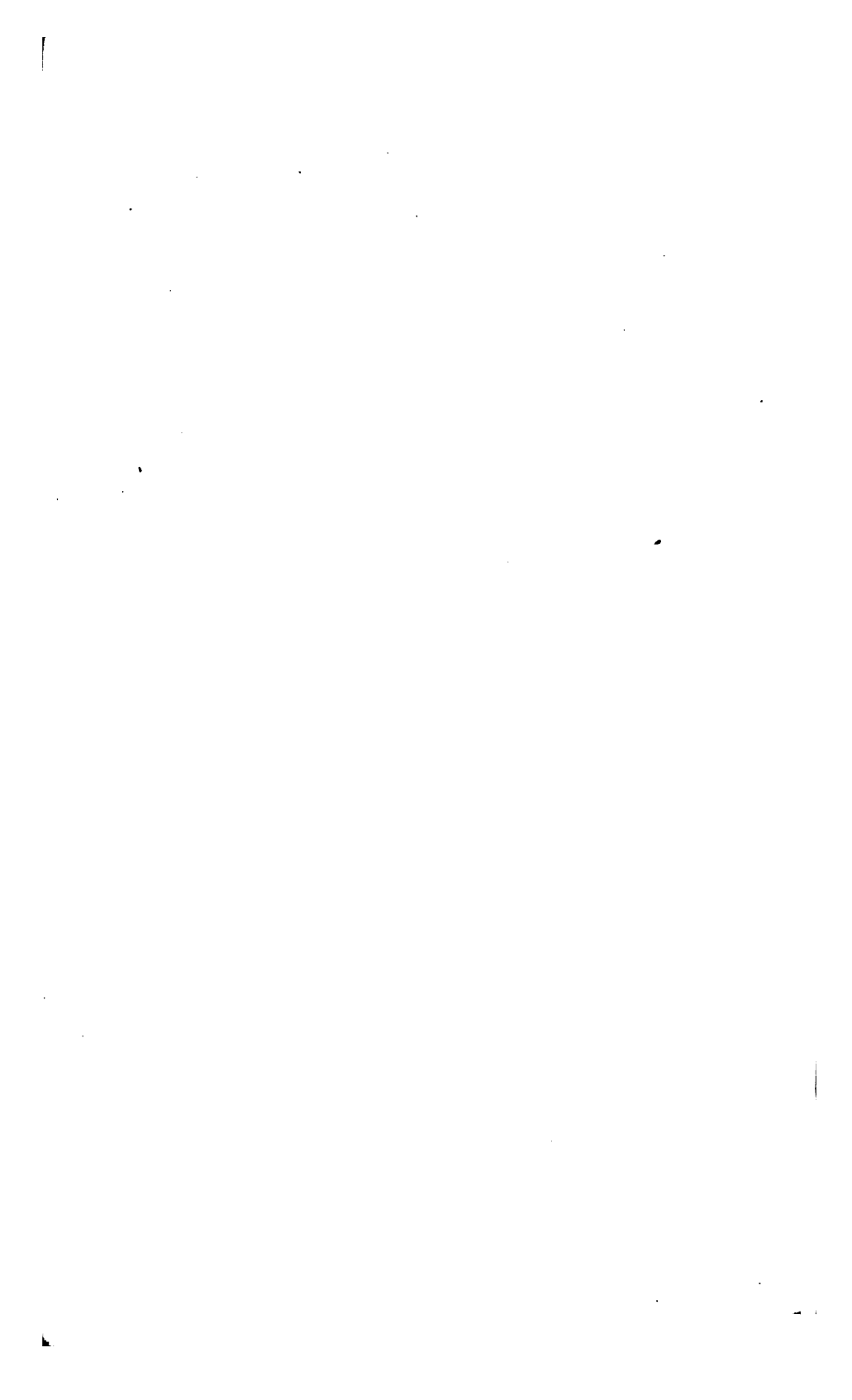
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*Mutarian  
Controversy*

OCCASIONED BY THE SERM

OF THE REVEREND WILLIAM E.

AT THE ORDINATION OF THE

REV. J. SPARKS.

BY LEONARD WOODS, D.D.

ABBOT PROFESSOR OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY IN THE THEOL.  
SEMINARY, ANDOVER.

ANDOVER :

PUBLISHED BY FLAGG AND GOULD.

1820.



# LETTERS

TO

## UNITARIANS

OCCASIONED BY THE SERMON

OF THE REVEREND WILLIAM E. CHANNING

AT THE ORDINATION OF THE

REV. J. SPARKS.

BY LEONARD WOODS, D.D.

ABBOT PROFESSOR OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY IN THE THEOL.  
SEMINARY, ANDOVER.

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ANDOVER :

PUBLISHED BY FLAGG AND GOULD.

1820.

DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, TO WIT :

*District Clerk's Office.*

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JNO. W. DAVIS, { Clerk of the District  
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### ERRATA.

Page 12, line 2 from bottom, read *conduct*.

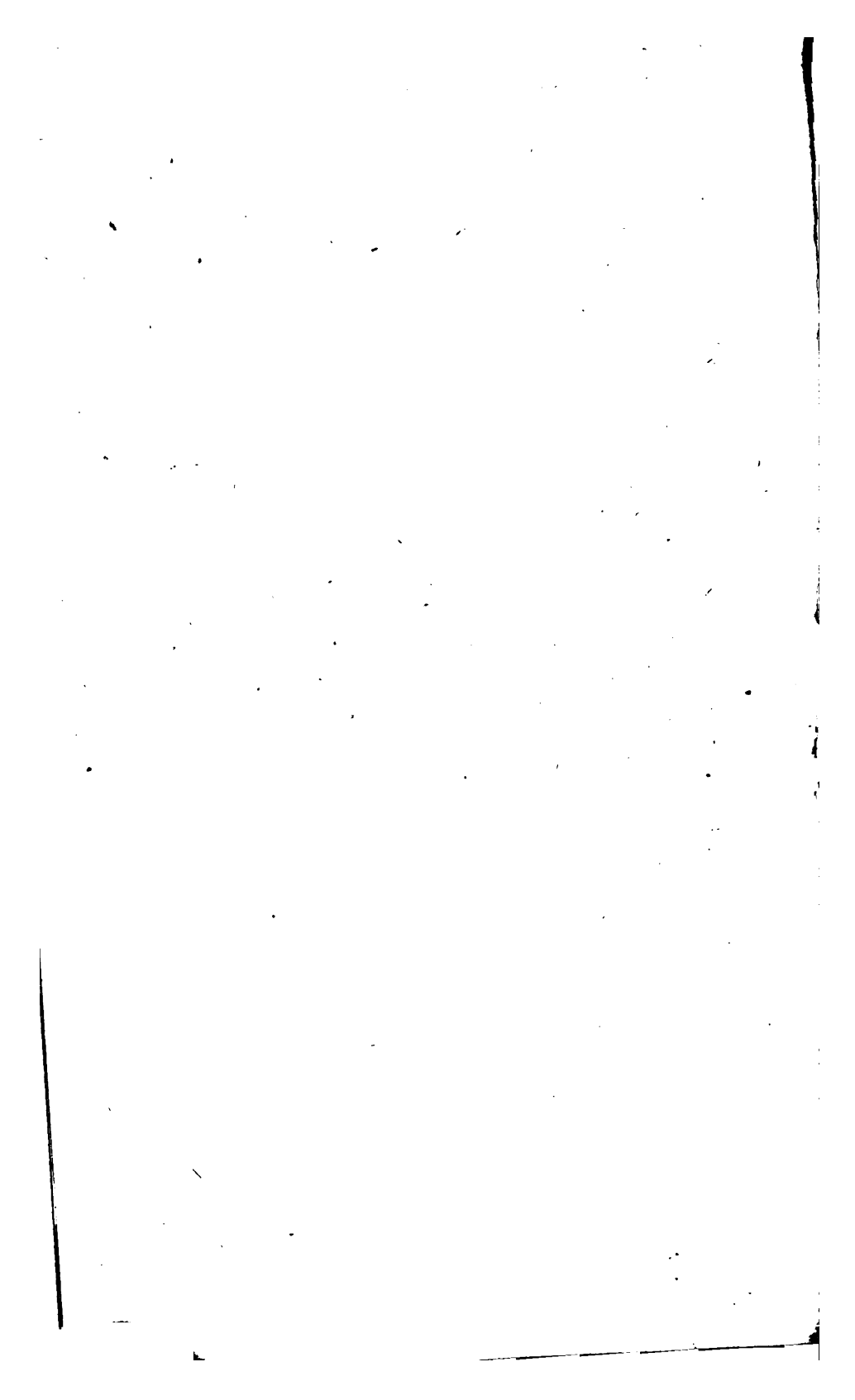
15, 1, *Mathers.*

25, 13, *could, for would.*

36, 15, *whatsoever.*

106, read, Letter *X*. P. 120, Letter *XI*.

132, Letter *XII*.



## LETTER I.

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS,

IT has been the general sentiment of those, who are denominated *Unitarians* in this country, that *religious controversy* is undesirable, and of dangerous tendency; and that it is the duty of Christians of different parties to look with candor on each other's opinions, and not to magnify, beyond necessity, the points of difference. To this sentiment of yours respecting the danger of controversy, and the importance of candor and forbearance, I cordially agree. I regard it, as one of the great ends, which remains to be achieved by the influence of the christian religion, that all bitterness and strife should be banished from the world, and the spirit of love and peace universally prevail. With a view to this momentous end, I have made it my care, to guard, as far as possible, against introducing any thing disputatious into the pulpit,—especially on an occasion of so much interest, and so much tender emotion, as that of ordaining a Christian Minister. By these views I have actually governed myself for many years. I admit, indeed, the lawfulness, and, in some cases, the expedience and necessity of religious controversy; and I have endeavored to form some definite views of the principles, on which it ought to be conducted. But I will frankly express my apprehension, that it may require more caution, meekness, and self control, than I possess, to secure

an exact observance of those rules of controversy, which I should prescribe for others. At the present time, and in my present undertaking, I cannot be insensible of special danger, as the controversy between the two parties has, for several years, been carried on in various forms, and with no inconsiderable warmth, and there are, I am sorry to say, on both sides, and even among the more moderate, too many symptoms of strong excitement. But whatever may be the circumstances of the present time, or the nature of the business I have undertaken, I wish here to declare my utter abhorrence of the practice, which has been too common, of applying reproachful epithets to an opponent, and of misrepresenting his real opinions, or endeavoring, by painting them in the most glaring colors, to expose them to contempt ;—especially, of any disposition to sully his reputation, to inflict a wound on his feelings, or to triumph at the discovery of his imperfections. Such things are totally repugnant to the legitimate ends of controversy, and ought to be reprobated by all Christians, just as we reprobate the ferocities and cruelties of savage war.

The sermon, which occasions these Letters to you, is entitled to particular attention; on account of the talents and public character of the author, and, most of all, because he feels himself authorised to speak in *your name*. The sermon comes forth, as the voice of your denomination, and is extensively circulated, as an instrument of promoting your cause. On such an occasion, it is unquestionably proper, that our attention should be turned afresh to the question, whether the cause, which this sermon advocates, is indeed *the cause of God*.

To men, who are friends to unfettered inquiry, I shall think it unnecessary to offer any apology for the freedom of my remarks on the various subjects, which

will be brought into view in these Letters. And I hope you will not deem it improper, that my remarks should be addressed to *you*,—inasmuch as the subjects of the discussion, on which I am entering, have been introduced by one, who appears before the public, as *your representative*;—especially, as the manner, in which he treats these subjects is, in most respects, not unlike the manner, in which they have generally been treated by those, who have embraced the Arian or Socinian faith. This sermon is a fair specimen of the mode, in which we have been accustomed to see our religious opinions opposed in the writings of Unitarians. Now it must be allowed to be a sufficient justification of this attempt of mine, if I am fully convinced, that my opinions, and those of the Orthodox generally, are misunderstood; and essentially misrepresented by *Unitarians*, and particularly by the author of this sermon. I am convinced of this. And I think too, that the mistaken views, exhibited in the sermon, are exhibited in a manner, which, after cool and sober examination, neither the writer, nor his readers, will be much disposed to justify.

It seems there has, for some time, been a general expectation in this vicinity of some publication from me relative to the sermon which has occasioned these Letters; and inquiries have not unfrequently been made, as to the reasons of such a delay. Those reasons I will now frankly suggest. First. The regular duties of my office are sufficient to occupy my whole time; and I found it would require some effort in me, to be able to devote only a few hours in a week to such an employment as this. Another reason was, that I wished not to interrupt the attention, which the public were inclined to give to what had already been written, on one of the principal subjects of discussion between the two par-

ties. Besides ; I hoped that by taking a longer time, I should keep myself at a greater distance from the agitation and heat of controversy, and more perfectly avoid every appearance of wishing to make a personal attack upon any man ; and that I should be better able to fix your attention, as well as my own, upon the subjects themselves, which were to be investigated, without regard to any considerations whatever, not conducive to a fair and thorough investigation.

The favor which I now ask of you is, not that you would treat my opinions and arguments with lenity and forbearance, but that you would give me a patient and candid hearing, while I attempt, on several important points, to explain and defend the religious sentiments of the Orthodox in New-England ; and while I attempt to show, in what respects the writings of Unitarians essentially misrepresent our faith, and go into a manner of reasoning which is liable to just exceptions. I wish, particularly, to state the objections I feel, to several representations and modes of argumentation, contained in this Sermon, and to suggest some reasons, why the Author himself, and those who have implicitly relied upon the correctness of his positions, should allow themselves time for a serious review of the ground of this controversy. I wish, in short, as far as the limits which I must prescribe for myself will allow, to embrace the present opportunity, to do justice to myself and my brethren, and to satisfy those, who differ from us, as to the character and the evidence of that system of religion, which we believe.

The subjects, which have been discussed by my beloved Colleague, the REV. MOSES STUART, will here be omitted. I regret, with many others, that his health and professional labors did not permit him to employ his tal-

ents and erudition on all the remaining topics of the Sermon. It is at his suggestion, and by his request, that I have turned aside from my common labors, and, let me say too, from my prevailing determination, so much as to take a part publicly in the controversy, which unhappily divides this region of our country. But, though I am urged to this undertaking by the request of those, in whom I am accustomed to repose entire confidence, and though I am fully persuaded that the opinions of the Orthodox have been treated unjustly; I am almost ready to withdraw my hand from this work, from a painful apprehension, that my efforts may serve but to increase or perpetuate the spirit of prejudice and animosity, which has shown itself among us in so many forms, and which, so far as it prevails, does really cut off all prospect of attaining the ends of free investigation. But I indulge the hope, that a different spirit is gaining ground. And I could wish, that the Reverend Author, who has undertaken to speak in your behalf, might have enjoyed the happiness of a more unruffled mind, and the honor of doing something more for that cause, which he is so well able to promote,—*the cause of love, candor, and gentleness*. I think that he, and many others will acknowledge the benefit they have, in this respect, derived from the example of my worthy Colleague. It is from the hope, that I may be guided by the same motive with him, and that, whatever else I may fail of accomplishing, I may help, in some measure, to diffuse a spirit of unprejudiced inquiry and christian kindness, that I am encouraged to proceed.

## LETTER II.

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS,

THE Author, who speaks in your name, has at length, it seems, obtained satisfaction, as to the propriety of having a *creed*, or *confession of faith*. In his sermon, he has expressly given to the public the opinions which Unitarians embrace, in distinction from the opinions, commonly called Orthodox. The design is just and honorable. I am utterly unable to conceive, what valid objection there can be against the attempt of any denomination of Christians, to make the public acquainted with their views on religious subjects; or, in other words, to exhibit the *articles of their faith*. The thing is evidently proper in itself, and often necessary, though liable to abuse. With so respectable an example before you, I trust you will be free from any further difficulties on this subject, and will proceed, as occasion may require, to correct any mistaken apprehensions which the public may entertain, as to your opinions, and to give them a just view of what you believe to be the Christian religion. You owe this to the community. You owe it to yourselves. And it is obvious, that justice, in this respect, can be rendered to you by none, but yourselves. Other men, especially those who differ from you, cannot be competent to make known your faith, any farther than they are instructed and authorized by you. Doubtless you have felt that you have had reason to complain of the incorrectness of some Orthodox writers, who have undertaken to make a statement of your views. It is with manifest propriety, that you have now claimed the right, and through him, who acts as your organ of communication, have ex-



exercised the right, of declaring your own opinions. If you are just to yourselves, you will not stop here. Whenever others impute to you opinions, which you do not entertain, or deny to you those, which you do entertain; and whenever they are doubtful as to your faith, or in any way misrepresent it; you will feel that, of right, it belongs to you to interpose, and to do yourselves justice. And you would think it a gross violation of the rules of christian candor, for any man to declare your opinions to be different from your own serious declaration.—Grant me, and those with whom I have the happiness to be united in opinion, the same right, which you so justly claim for yourselves,—*the right of forming and declaring our own opinions, and of being believed, when we declare them.* We have a just claim to the last, as well as to the first, unless there are substantial reasons to question our veracity.

By the diligent application of our rational powers to the study of the Scriptures, with the best helps which have been afforded us, we have arrived at some sober, settled views on the subjects of religion. These views we wish, for various reasons, to declare. And if we would declare them justly, we must declare them in *our own language*, and do what is in our power to make that language intelligible to all. Where the meaning of the terms employed is doubtful, or obscure; it belongs to us to give the necessary explanations. Where the terms are liable to be understood with greater latitude, than comports with our views; it belongs to us to give the necessary limitations. And where our positions, in any respect whatever, need modifying; it belongs to us to modify them.—Further. It is certainly reasonable to expect, when dealing with men of candid, liberal minds, that the language which, in any case, we use to express

our faith, will be understood, not in the sense which, taken by itself, it would possibly bear, nor in the sense which others might be inclined, for party purposes, to put upon it,—but *precisely according to our explanations*. These explanations, you will understand, do as really make a part of the proper enunciation of our faith, as the words which form the general proposition. Nothing can be more obviously just than all this, especially in relation to a subject, which is of a complex nature, or of difficult illustration.

With respect to this point of equity and honor, I have a few remarks to make on the Sermon now under consideration. The Author informs the public, what opinions he, and those who agree with him, embrace, and what they reject. This he has a right to do. Considering the circumstances of the case, he ought to do it. Nor can any one doubt that he is qualified to do it in the best manner. But he goes farther. He undertakes to give an account of *my* creed, and the creed of others with whom I agree. This is a more delicate task. In this he is evidently liable to mistake; and after all he may say on the subject, we may find it necessary to speak for ourselves. If the account he gives of our faith is not given in our language, and with our explanations and modifications,—certainly if not given in a manner which corresponds with our real opinions; we must notice the incorrectness. Most of all shall we have reason for some animadversion upon him, if he adopts, in any measure, that mode of representation, which men usually adopt, who wish to make the opinions of their opponents appear as exceptionable and absurd as possible.

So far as this sermon shall come under review, my remarks will relate chiefly to two points. *The first is, its affirming that certain opinions belong peculiarly and ex-*

*clusively to Unitarians, when in fact they are held by the Orthodox. The second is, the misrepresentations it makes of the opinions which the Orthodox entertain, and of the reasoning commonly used to support them.* These two points cannot be kept perfectly distinct in every part of the discussion; but it will be sufficiently evident to which my observations relate. For the present I shall beg your attention to the first.

Heretofore, it has been common for Unitarians in this country, and, if I mistake not, for this Author himself, to assert that, in respect of religious opinions, there is *no essential difference* between them and the Orthodox. For the sake of preventing disunion and strife, they have seemed to think it desirable, that the difference should be made to appear as small as possible. But from the tenor of this discourse, one would be apt to suppose that this Author's judgment or feelings had changed, and that he thought some important end was to be answered, by making the difference between the two parties as wide as possible. If this is a matter of fact, it is easy to see how it may have occasioned some of the mistakes, into which he has been led.

In the Sermon, p. 3, he declares what regard he and his particular friends feel for the Bible, and the principles of interpretation, by which they govern themselves in determining what doctrines it contains.—“We regard the Scriptures,” he says, “as the record of God's successive revelation to mankind, and particularly of the last and most perfect revelation of his will by Jesus Christ. Whatever doctrines seem to us to be clearly taught in the Scriptures we receive without reserve or exception.”—It is implied in what he says, that this sentiment of reverence for the Scriptures is *peculiar to Unitarians*. For he first expresses his design to lay before his hear-

ers, "some of the *distinguishing* opinions of that class of Christians," in whose name he speaks, and then at the close says, *that he has given their "distinguishing views ;"* that is, their views in *distinction* from those of the Orthodox.—I ask then, is it so? Is this high veneration for the Scriptures peculiar to *Unitarians*?—Do not the Orthodox uniformly declare their reverence for the Bible, and their readiness to submit to all its instructions? Do they not embrace that system of doctrines, which is peculiar to them, purely because they are convinced it is contained in the word of God, and because with this conviction, they cannot reject it, without disrespect to that word?—Read their confessions of faith, their systems of Divinity, their Commentaries, Sermons, catechisms, and books of devotion, and then say, whether they do not manifest as high a regard for the sacred volume, as this Author expresses?—Why then should it be signified, that this veneration for the Bible is among those things, which *distinguish* Unitarians from the Orthodox?—Such a representation must certainly appear somewhat unaccountable to one, who knows what opinions have generally been avowed and defended by these two parties, respecting the regard which is due to the Holy Scriptures.

As to these principles of interpretation, there is no need of adding any thing to what has been written by my Reverend Colleague. You perceive that these principles are not peculiar to Unitarians. They are substantially the principles of the Orthodox; so that, if you adopt them, the question between us is not, as would appear from the Sermon, whether the principles are to be *admitted*; but to what *conclusions* will they conduct us, when fairly applied to the interpretation of Scripture.

In relation to this point, the Author does indeed seem to make a concession in favor of others.—“We do not announce these principles,” he says, “as original or peculiar to ourselves.”—But immediately he takes occasion to follow his opponents with a train of reproachful insinuations, signifying, that although they occasionally adopt these principles, they vehemently decry them, when their cause requires; that they willingly avail themselves of reason, when it can be pressed into the service of their own party, and only complain of it, when its weapons wound themselves; that they violate the fundamental rules of reasoning, sacrifice the plain to the obscure, &c.

Under the same head I might place the following remarks of this Author.—“God’s wisdom is a pledge, that whatever is necessary for us, and necessary for salvation, is revealed too plainly to be mistaken, and too consistently to be questioned by a sound and upright mind. It is not a mark of wisdom, to use an unintelligible phraseology, and to confuse and unsettle the intellect by appearances of contradiction.”—Here also he evidently means to express sentiments, which belong *peculiarly* to his own party.—I cannot but think it strange, that it did not occur to his recollection, that *the plainness and intelligibleness of the Scriptures on all essential points* is a principle, for which the Orthodox in New England have uniformly contended with great zeal, even in their controversy with Unitarians.

Under the second head of his discourse, the Author undertakes “to state some of the views which Unitarians derive from the sacred book, particularly those which distinguish them from other Christians.”—It will be to my purpose just to notice the first doctrine he states, though it has been remarked upon so satisfac-

torily in the publication above named. This is the *unity* of *God* ; which the Author represents as a doctrine *peculiar* to his party. After reading his remarks, and the remarks of other Unitarians on this subject, who would expect to find, that all respectable writers on the side of Orthodoxy have strenuously asserted the *unity* of *God*, as a fundamental doctrine of revelation, and have declared, times without number, that they could admit no views of the divine character inconsistent with this ? Who would expect to find that, in all Confessions of faith written by Trinitarians, the *unity* of *God* is one of the first doctrines which is asserted, and in all their systems of Divinity, one of the first, which is distinctly and largely defended ?—Truly, my respected friends, this doctrine is as important in our view, as it can be in yours. And we could not in reality have more reason to charge Unitarian Authors with injustice, should they represent us as denying the *existence* of *God*, than we have, when they represent us as denying his *unity*.

But we proceed to another point, on which this Author lays still greater stress.—“ We believe,” he says, “ in the *moral perfection of God*.—We value our views of Christianity chiefly, as they assert his amiable and venerable attributes.”—From the professed object of the discourse, and the language here employed, it appears, that the Author makes it the grand characteristic of Unitarianism in distinction from Orthodoxy, that it asserts the *moral perfection of God*.—But is this representation, as to the grand distinction between the parties, according to truth ? Is it a representation, which he is authorized to make ?—When the most eminent Divines and most enlightened Christians, who have at any time embraced the common doctrines of Orthodoxy,—Luther, Calvin, Boyle, Hale, Baxter, Doddridge, Watts, the Ed-

wardses, the Matthers, the Coopers, and multitudes, not to be numbered, of the same general faith, unite in declaring expressly, and constantly, that they *believe in the moral perfection of God*, that they ascribe to him infinite justice, goodness, and holiness, and continually adore his amiable and venerable attributes ;—who is it that thinks himself entitled to look down upon this host of worthies, and reply,—“ it is very possible to speak of God magnificently, and to think of him meanly ; to apply to his person high sounding epithets, and to his government, principles which make him odious. The heathens called Jupiter the greatest and the best ; but his history was black with cruelty and lust.”—I make use of no high coloring. This is the reply, which the Author of the sermon makes, actually, and in so many words, to the most serious professions of the Orthodox, whoever they may be, as to their belief in the *moral perfection of God*. If he does not mean to apply what I have quoted, to the *Orthodox*, he has lost sight of the object of his discourse, and his subsequent reasoning, as you will see in a moment, is wholly impertinent.

In another form, he afterwards repeats insinuations of the same sort. “ *We* believe,” he says,—“ *We*,” emphatically, and by way of distinction from the Orthodox, —“ *We* believe that in no being is the sense of right so strong, so omnipotent, as in God. We believe that his almighty power is entirely submitted to his perception of rectitude.—It is not because he is our Creator merely, but because he created us for good and holy purposes ; it is not because his will is irresistible, but because his will is the perfection of virtue, that we pay him allegiance. We cannot bow before a being, however great and powerful, who governs tyrannically. We respect nothing but excellence, whether on earth or in heaven.”

—Now the whole body of enlightened Christians, who embrace the common orthodox faith, give their united testimony to the same truths, and declare their veneration and love for a God of the same amiable character. In their creeds, systems, sermons, psalmody, and prayers, they abundantly assert these views respecting the *moral perfection of God*. They have asserted them continually, and publicly. They have taught them to their children. They have repeated them in a thousand forms.—And yet this author, speaking in your name too, feels himself entitled to say to them all in reply;—“It is very possible to speak of God magnificently, and to think of him meanly.—Your system takes from us our Father in heaven, and substitutes for him a being, whom we cannot love if we would, and whom we ought not to love if we could.”—*Candor and liberality of mind* are virtues which Unitarians have considered peculiarly honorable, and which they have appeared ambitious to advance to the highest degree of influence. I would just inquire, whether these virtues are likely to be improved, or to acquire greater influence, either among Unitarians, or the Orthodox, by such language as this Author uses respecting his opponents,—language apparently expressive of real conviction, and characterized by strength and elegance, but unfortunately wanting in justice and truth.—We claim the right of thinking for ourselves, and of declaring what we think. But according to the principle which seems to govern this writer’s pen, there would be no possibility of our ever making a declaration of our opinions, which would be entitled to credit. For suppose we should profess our full assent to the strongest propositions of this author respecting the moral perfection of God; suppose we should say the very things which he says, in the same forms, and in different forms,



and should enlarge upon them, and carry them into their practical uses, and should show by our conduct, that such are our sober views of the divine character; he could still meet all this with the reply ;—" It is possible to apply to God's person high sounding epithets, and to his government, principles which make him odious. The heathens called Jupiter the greatest and the best; but his history was black with cruelty and lust."—If the picture, which this Author has drawn of our opinions on this subject were chargeable with only a little misrepresentation ;—or if it were ever so great a misrepresentation on a subject of no considerable importance ; it would be worthy of little notice. But it is, if I mistake not, a great and total misrepresentation, on a subject of vital consequence to religion, both theoretic and practical. And every man, and every child, who has received his impression from this sermon, as to the views of the Orthodox on the subject now under consideration, has been led into a palpable and total mistake as to a matter of fact,—a matter of fact, concerning which the Orthodox must be considered the best, and the only competent judges. To them therefore I appeal. And I am sure they will be sensible of the truth of what I say, and will be compelled, from a sense of justice to themselves, to declare, that, however free from blame the *motives* of this Author may have been, the representation he has here made of their views, is totally incorrect,—that it is false throughout, and in the highest degree.

### LETTER III.

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS,

I wish you not to infer from any thing contained in the foregoing letter, nor from the general aspect of it, that I am desirous of avoiding that kind of investigation, which the Author of the sermon has represented, as necessary in this case.—“We cannot,” he remarks, “judge of men’s real ideas of God from their general language.—We must inquire into their particular views of his purposes, of the principles of his administration, and of his disposition towards his creatures.”—To this mode of proceeding I cheerfully accede. Accordingly, I will not ask you to rest ultimately on my bare assertion, that Unitarians give an incorrect account of our opinions, nor upon my *general* declaration, that we believe in the *moral perfection of God*.—That you may be under the best advantages to judge, whether we do in fact, believe in the moral perfection of God, it appears indispensable that I should state, summarily, what *particular* views we entertain of God’s character,—“of the principles of his administration, and of his disposition towards his creatures.”—For the *correctness* of the statement I shall now make, I must refer you to the writings of those Orthodox Divines, who are the most judicious, and the most generally approved.

*Views of the Orthodox respecting the moral character and government of God.*

The sentiment, which forms the basis of our system, is, that GOD IS LOVE. This declaration of Scripture we understand in its plain and obvious sense, and believe it happily expresses the whole moral character of God.—

*He is a Being of infinite and perfect benevolence ;—benevolence without mixture, and without variation.* This is the disposition of God toward his creatures ; the disposition which prompted him to create, and which prompts him to govern. The object of benevolence, or goodness, is, to do good, to promote real happiness. The object of *infinite* benevolence must be to promote the *highest degree* of happiness.—As to the ways, in which God will secure the greatest amount of happiness to his intelligent creation, we can know nothing, except what God is pleased to reveal. So far as our duty or comfort is concerned, he has given us instruction. According to the Scriptures, the grand means, by which God will promote the happiness of his kingdom, is the administration of a *moral government*. Such a government implies a law, enforced by proper sanctions ; that is, by the promise of good to the obedient, and the threat of evil to the disobedient. These promises and threats, being necessary parts of a benevolent moral government, are expressions of the divine goodness. So is the execution of them. Thus the proper punishment of the disobedient, as it is essential to the administration of a perfect moral government, is, in reality, an act of goodness,—an expression of God's benevolent regard to his kingdom. When there is occasion for it, a *good father* will *punish*. He may punish not only *consistently* with his being good, but *because* he is good. God is a father to his kingdom ; and will, therefore, show his displeasure against that which tends to injure that kingdom.—As to the degree and duration of the punishment, which will be inflicted on transgressors, we are, of ourselves, wholly incompetent to judge ; for the obvious reason, that we are not capable of knowing what the present and future interests of a kingdom, so extensive, will require. We believe that,

according to the Scriptures, God will inflict on the wicked a great and everlasting punishment. But, so far as reasoning is concerned, we believe this, as a consequence of believing, that God will feel and manifest displeasure against sin in proportion to the strength of the love, which he feels for his kingdom. In other words, we believe he will inflict on the disobedient that very punishment, which they deserve, and which, *He being judge*, the welfare of his kingdom renders necessary. We consider the demerit of sin to be great, in proportion to the moral excellence of God, against whom it is committed, and to the value of those interests, which it aims to destroy. Here you see why we view *punitive justice*, as a branch of *benevolence*, an exercise of *goodness*. As God is a moral Governor, and the Guardian of the interests of the creation, the want of justice in punishing offences would betray the want of goodness. Thus we believe, as this Author informs us Unitarians believe,—that the justice of God “is, the justice of a good being, dwelling in the same mind, and acting in harmony with perfect benevolence.” He represents the belief, “that justice and mercy are intimate friends, breathing the same spirit, and seeking the same end,” as peculiar to Unitarians; though it is in truth the general belief of the Orthodox.—But in case of transgression, justice and mercy must seek the same end in different ways. In the exercise of *justice*, God seeks the happiness of his kingdom by *punishing* an offence;—in the exercise of *mercy*, or *grace*, by *forgiving* an offence. This Author says, “God’s mercy, as we understand it, desires strongly the happiness of the guilty.” We believe the same. But he adds a condition. “God’s mercy desires strongly the happiness of the guilty, *but only through their penitence*.”—We go farther. We believe, indeed, that repentance

is essential to the happiness of the guilty; but we believe also, because we are so taught in the Scriptures, that repentance itself, without the death of a Mediator, could be of no avail. To forgive sin in any other way, than through *the shedding of blood*, would not consist with a due regard to "the interests of virtue," and so, to use this Author's language, "would be incompatible with justice, and also with enlightened benevolence." On the other hand, we think it equally clear, that the happiness of the *impenitent* would be not only inconsistent with the divine perfections, but in the nature of things impossible.

We believe, as sincerely as Unitarians do, in the *paternal character* of God. You "ascribe to him," as this Author informs us, "not only the name, but the dispositions, and principles of a father." With the qualifications which the divine perfection renders necessary, we do the same.—The language refers to the dispositions of a *human* father. These dispositions belong to God, *so far as is consistent with his infinite perfection*. It is plain, that the dispositions of God, and the conduct flowing from them cannot, in *all* respects, resemble the dispositions and conduct of a human father. The nature of a human father, and the relation he sustains to his children, have but an imperfect analogy to the nature of God, and the relation he sustains to his creatures. From this we conclude, that his treatment of his creatures cannot be fully represented by the treatment, which a human father gives his children. Permit me to illustrate this by a few examples.—What human father, possessing even a common degree of paternal kindness and compassion, would ever treat his children, as God treated his rational offspring, when he destroyed the world by a deluge, or Sodom by fire, or when he caused the earth to

open and swallow up the company of Korah? Would a compassionate father drown his children, or consume them by fire, or bury them alive in the earth?—God suffers his rational creatures, even harmless children, to die of hunger, or of sickness, or to be destroyed by some act of cruelty. Could a human father stand and see his children die thus, when it was in the power of his hand to afford relief?—I mention these among a thousand instances, as proof, that the analogy between God and a human father, though a very striking and delightful one, is not perfect, and may be carried too far. Most certainly it is carried too far by those, who undertake to prove what God will do or will not do, as to the punishment of the wicked in the future world, by the consideration, that he is metaphorically called a *father*. The analogy implied in this metaphor must be guarded, and kept within due limits, as carefully as the analogy implied in the metaphors, by which God is called a fire, a man of war, &c. It is not necessary here particularly to exhibit the principles, which we apply in the interpretation of metaphorical language. I will only say, in short, that we can be in no danger of mistake, when we fix upon the analogy, which is suggested by the metaphor itself, and by the manifest design of the writer, and limit the analogy, as we do in common cases, by the knowledge we have obtained of the subject from other sources.—On these principles, the soundness of which will not be called in question, we look to God as a father; we love him as a father; we trust in him as a father. We believe he has a paternal affection for his rational offspring, and takes delight, as a father does, in promoting their welfare. Nay more; we believe that the love of God is not only sincere and durable, like that of a father, but is free from all human imperfection, and distinguished by a

purity, elevation, and activity, infinitely superior to what belongs to the love of the best father on earth.

I cannot do justice to Orthodox ministers without adding, that their belief in the moral excellence of God is not a matter of mere speculation. It is in the highest degree practical. They make the infinite and immutable goodness of God the grand motive to religious worship. They inculcate it, as the spring of all pious affections. They present it to the view of Christians to produce higher love, gratitude, and joy. They present it to the view of sinners, to show them the inexcusable guilt and baseness of their disaffection to their Maker, and to induce them to return to him by repentance. They dwell upon the unchangeable love of God, which has a length, and breadth, and depth, and height, passing all understanding, as the source of joy in prosperity, of comfort in affliction, and triumph in death. And they lead Christians to expect, that their highest enjoyments in heaven will arise from the more glorious display, which God will there make, of his infinite benignity and grace.

It would be great injustice to Orthodox ministers and Christians, both in Europe and America, to pass over the influence, which their belief in the divine goodness has, to excite *benevolent exertion*. It is because they believe that *God is love*, and that he is ready to pardon and save all who repent, that they are engaged in such plans of benevolence, and are striving, in various ways, to enlighten and convert the world. In all these benevolent efforts, they are aiming at a humble imitation of Him, who is the supreme object of their veneration and love.

Now when I consider what stress the Orthodox lay upon the moral perfection of God, the variety of ways, in which they acknowledge and affirm it, and the paramount influence which it has upon their conduct; I am

not a little surprised that any man should charge them with denying it. It is, in reality, the *very last* thing they would deny. I appeal to millions of witnesses, who will tell you, that they are as far from denying the *moral perfection* of God, as they are from denying that he *exists*; and that his existence would not only cease to afford them satisfaction, but would fill them with anxiety and dread, had they not a certain belief, that he is possessed of perfect rectitude, of unbounded and unchangeable goodness. And after the statement I have now made, and similar statements made by others, of the sentiments of the Orthodox on this subject; I leave it to you candidly to judge, what occasion the Author of this sermon could have for saying what he does, in the following pathetic passage;—"We ask our opponents to leave us a God, worthy of our love and trust, in whom our moral sentiments may delight, in whom our weaknesses and sorrows may find refuge."

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## LETTER IV.

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS,

I would now ask your attention more particularly to the *manner*, in which the Author of this sermon attempts to make it appear, that we deny the moral perfection of God. If I understand him right, as I think I do, he infers our denial of God's moral perfection from our "particular views of his purposes, of the principles of his administration, and of his disposition towards his creatures."

Now if we admit, for the present, the most that any one could desire,—that our views on these subjects are,



in reality, inconsistent with the moral perfection of God ; still the allegation here brought against us, is not well supported.—I may *really believe* a certain important doctrine, though I believe other things inconsistent with it. The *consistency* of my belief is one thing ; the *reality* of it, another. I may entertain various opinions, which, if examined thoroughly, would appear inconsistent with my belief of some primary truth ;—yet the inconsistency may not be apparent to me ; and I may as really believe that primary truth, and act as much under its influence, as though I did not entertain those other opinions. In such a case, though an opponent might attack me on the ground of my *consistency*, he would not, with any justice, represent me as *denying* that primary truth. Accordingly, the most which this Author could properly say, even on the admission above supposed, would be that we do not believe the moral perfection of God *consistently*, though we may believe it *really*.

But can the Orthodox be justly charged with entertaining opinions, which are, in fact, inconsistent with their belief in the moral perfection of God ? this is the question now to be argued. The Author of the sermon seems to rest the charge chiefly on two points ; first, the doctrine we hold as to the *natural character of man* ; second, the doctrine we hold, as to the *manner in which God designates the heirs of salvation*.—I shall begin with the first.

Here allow me to remark, with freedom, on the *mode of reasoning* which in my apprehension, ought to be pursued on such a subject as this.—I am happy to find the following principle suggested by the Author of the sermon.—“ Whatever doctrines seem to us to be clearly taught in the Scriptures, we receive without reserve or exception.” Right. But in relation to this

subject, has he adhered to his own principle? With respect to the common doctrine of man's depravity, the grand inquiry which ought to have engaged his attention, was this;—*Do the scriptures, understood according to just rules of interpretation, teach the doctrine? And does the doctrine agree with facts, made known by experience and observation?*—All reasoning *a priori*, in this case especially, is to be rejected. And so is every hypothesis, unless it is evidently founded on Scripture and observation. Independently of revelation, and well known facts; *we are actually incapable of judging, what the goodness of God will require, as to the condition of man; or what man's character and state must be, under the government of a being infinitely wise and benevolent.* Our inability to judge on the subject might be made evident, from the utter impossibility of our having any adequate knowledge respecting either the infinite perfection of God, or the vast and endless scheme of his operations. But without any labored argument to prove, what must be so plain to every intelligent man, it will be sufficient for my present purpose, merely to refer to a few other facts, which are admitted on all hands, but which are quite as different from what we should have previously thought agreeable to the infinite perfections of God, as the moral depravity of man.—Who would have supposed that a God of tender compassion and unbounded goodness would send plagues, hurricanes, and earthquakes, and involve multitudes of affectionate parents, and multitudes of lovely, helpless children in a sudden and dreadful destruction?—Who would have thought that the Lord of the universe, who has an absolute control over all creatures and all events, would suffer the cruelties and horrors of the *Slave-trade* to exist for so long a time?—These are great difficulties. But there is one still greater; name-

ly; that the God of love, who delights in mercy, and would have all men to be saved, and who has given his Son to die for the redemption of the world, should, after all, suffer the greater part of the world to live and die without any knowledge of the Savior.—These facts, which are known to all, are as far from being agreeable to what we should naturally imagine the infinite goodness of God would dictate, as the fact, that men are subjects of moral depravity. But our being unable, by the mere exercise of reason, to discover the consistency between these facts and the infinite goodness of God, is no proof that the facts do not exist, and no proof that they are in reality inconsistent with divine goodness.—With regard to all subjects like these, the only mode of reasoning, which can be relied upon to lead us to right conclusions, is that which is pursued in the science of Physics. Regulating ourselves by the maxims of BACON and NEWTON, we inquire, not what we should expect the properties and laws of the physical world would be, nor whether this or that thing can be reconciled with the infinite wisdom and goodness of God,—but simply, *what is fact? What do we find from observation and experience, that the properties and laws of nature really are?* This inquiry, to be philosophical, must be perfectly unembarrassed by any other inquiry? The moment we undertake to shape the conclusions we adopt, or the facts we discover, so as to make them conform to any preconceived opinion; we depart from the legitimate rule of philosophical research, and expose ourselves to endless perplexity and error. I might, if necessary, fill a volume with examples of the vagaries of human reason, flowing from the neglect of this grand principle of philosophical research. The importance of this principle, and the hurtful consequences of disregarding it, are now admitted by all enlightened philosophers. And it

is to the strict observance of it, that we owe our present advancement in the science of *Physics*.

Now this principle is as applicable to the science of *Theology*, as to the science of *Physics*. Indeed, it will be found that in *Theology* it is still more necessary, and that any departure from it, is attended with still greater danger, than in *Physics*. *Theology*, as well as *Philosophy*, is founded on facts. The first thing to be done in either case, is to determine, by the proper method of inquiry, what are the facts, on which the science is founded. In *Philosophy*, we learn facts merely by observation and experience. In *Theology*, we have additional aid. Revelation, as well as observation and experience, makes known facts, which form the basis of Theological reasoning. But in both cases, the chief object of inquiry, and the rule of reasoning are the same. We first inquire for the knowledge of facts; and by reasoning from facts, we arrive at general truths. If in either case we neglect this grand principle of reasoning, we are involved in uncertainty, confusion, and error. Suppose a man attempts to prove, from what he thinks divine wisdom or benevolence must dictate, or from what he knows of some other subject, that all parts of the earth must enjoy equal illumination and warmth from the influence of the sun, and must afford equal advantages and comforts to the inhabitants. But what becomes of his arguments, when he looks abroad, and compares the rocks, and ice, and gloomy nights of Greenland, or the sands of Arabia, with the pleasantness and fertility of some other parts of the earth? Or suppose, in any case, he assumes what must be the nature of some particular thing, but afterwards finds, that the phenomena, which that thing exhibits, do not correspond with his assumption. Shall he deny or disregard those phenomena? Or shall he not rather

dismiss his assumption?—Now it is not a whit less unphilosophical, to admit any presumptive or hypothetical reasoning in *Ethics*, or *Theology*, than in the science of *Physics*.—Suppose we think it inconsistent with the infinite goodness of God, that he should create an order of rational beings, and place them in such circumstances of temptation, as he certainly knew would be followed by their transgression and ruin; or that a God of infinite power, who has all hearts and all events in his hand, should suffer mankind, through a hundred generations, to be in a state of ignorance, rebellion, and wretchedness, when it is so easy for him to prevent it. But suppose on further inquiry, we find in both cases the existence of facts, which we denied. Shall we deny them still?—It is true we may not be able to reconcile them with the perfections of God. What then? Are we omniscient? Is our understanding above the possibility of mistake?

These remarks are intended to simplify the object of inquiry, with regard to the native character of man. They are intended to show that, according to the just principles of reasoning in such a case, we have nothing to do with the inquiry, whether the common doctrine of depravity can consist with the moral perfection of God, or with any difficulty whatever in the attempt to reconcile them. If I say, *this doctrine cannot be true*, because I cannot reconcile it with the goodness of God; it is the same as saying, *I am an infallible judge*, and my opinion must stand, though opposed by the declarations of Scripture, and the evidence of facts. To take such a position of mind would be an effectual bar to conviction, and render all reasoning absolutely useless. If we would regulate our investigations on this subject by correct principles; we must reject totally every prepossession against the doctrine of depravity, arising from a consideration of

the divine perfections, or from any thing else, and must restrict ourselves to this single inquiry, *what is true in fact?* If the subject is one, on which the Scripture undertakes to decide; the question is, *what saith the Scripture?* If experience and observation cast any light on the subject; the question is, what do *they* teach? If when we pursue our inquiry, we find, that the Scripture, interpreted without the influence of any prepossession, and according to just rules, teaches, that man is by nature unholy; this must, unhesitatingly, be admitted as a certain truth. That God declares it, is proof enough. His testimony is an infinitely better foundation for our faith, than all our reasonings. If observation and experience teach the same truth; we are to admit it as doubly confirmed. As to the *goodness of God*, we know it from other evidence. The truth under consideration must, then, according to the supposition, be admitted to be in reality consistent with the goodness of God, however hard it may be for those, who are of yesterday and know nothing, to elucidate that consistency.

The subject under consideration is one, on which we are peculiarly liable to judge erroneously, for the obvious reason, that we have a deep personal concern in it. We are among those, whom the commonly received doctrine arraigns, as polluted and guilty. The doctrine touches our character, and our honor. It aims a blow at our selfesteem. It disturbs our quiet. The consideration of this circumstance should excite us to guard most vigilantly against that prejudice, discolored of evidence, and partial judgment, to which we know every man, in such a case, is exposed.

## LETTER V.

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS,

The doctrine, which the Orthodox in New England hold on the subject, introduced in the last Letter, is briefly this ; *that men are by nature destitute of holiness ;* or that they are subjects of an *innate moral depravity ;* or, in other words, that they are from the first inclined to evil, and that, while unrenewed, their moral affections and actions are wholly wrong. The doctrine, you perceive, is merely the assertion of a general fact. I shall at present consider this fact by itself, entirely unencumbered with any question about the occasion or the mode of it.

It is far from my design to exhibit, in detail, the arguments, by which this doctrine is proved. I shall attain my principal object, if I succeed in attempting to expose a wrong method of reasoning, and contribute any thing towards producing in those, who may honor me with their attention, a steady desire to know the truth, and a disposition to investigate the subject of man's natural character, on right principles, and without being shackled by unreasonable prepossessions. But the case seems to require, that I should lay before you, if not all the particular proofs, at least the general topics of argument, on which I ground my humbling conclusion.— Here then, I contend, and hold myself ready to demonstrate, that there is no principle in the science of Physics, which is established by evidence more uniform, and more conclusive, than the moral depravity of man. I speak now of the evidence which is furnished merely by experience and observation, without looking to the Bi-

ble. The appearances of human nature, from infancy to old age, and from the fall of Adam to the present time, prove a deeprooted and universal disease. The existence of this moral disease is practically acknowledged by all, who have any concern in the education of children and youth, or who endeavor, in any form, to bring the actions of men to conform to the rule of duty. The strength of this disease is made evident by all the restraints, which parents are obliged to put upon their children, rulers upon their subjects, and all men, who aim at being virtuous, upon themselves. This disorder of our nature is indicated by as clear, as various, and as uniform symptoms, as ever indicated the existence of a fever, or a consumption, in an individual.—The evidence of human depravity from this source alone, is so great, that, should I reject it as insufficient, I should manifest a strength of prejudice, which, I soberly think, no increase of evidence could overcome. And I would propose it as a serious question, whether, if any of us should stand by, as impartial spectators, and see, in another order of beings, the same indications of character, which we see in the human species, we should hesitate a moment to pronounce them, *depraved*.

But as our views of this subject must depend chiefly on revelation, I shall proceed to exhibit, though in a very summary way, the *principal scripture arguments*, on which the doctrine of man's universal depravity rests. I shall first illustrate the argument, or rather *the principle of reasoning*, from the *Old Testament*. For this purpose I shall take a single passage, which may stand for a multitude of the same nature. Gen. vi. 5. "*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*"



It is objected to the argument commonly drawn from this text, that it related to mankind in a season of uncommon corruption, and not to mankind at large, and that it is altogether improper to infer the character of the whole human race from the shocking barbarity and wickedness, which have been perpetrated in any particular age or country. The same objection is thought to lie against our reasoning from any of the numerous passages in the Old Testament, in which human wickedness is declared; namely, that they relate exclusively to those who lived at particular times, when iniquity prevailed to an uncommon degree, and cannot be applied to mankind generally.

We are now to inquire, whether this objection is valid.

The text quoted from Gen. vi. 5, did indeed relate to the corruption of men, who lived before the general deluge. But we find substantially the same testimony given of the human character, soon after the deluge. Gen. viii. 21, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." There are two reasons for considering this as relating to *mankind universally*, or to *human nature*. The first is, that the language is *general*. "The imagination of *man's* heart is evil;" not Noah's heart, nor the heart of either of his sons *particularly*; but *man's* heart,—the heart of the *human kind*. Thus we are led to consider it, as the testimony of God respecting the character of our apostate race. The second reason for this construction is, that the *curse* spoken of in the same verse related to mankind in all future ages. "I will not again curse the ground any more for *man's sake*;" that is, I will not at *any future time*. Immediately after the testimony above quoted, God said, "neither will I again smite any more *every* living thing, as I have done." It

was said in relation to all future time. The description given of man's character must be understood as equally extensive; "*for*," or as it ought, according to the best authorities, and according to the obvious sense of the passage, to be rendered, "*though* the imagination of *man's* heart is evil from his youth." The meaning of the whole taken together is plainly this; that God would not destroy the world again by a deluge, as he had done, though the character of mankind generally would be, as it had been.—History shows that it has been so in fact.

Further to illustrate the force of the argument, from the Old Testament, and the weakness of the objection against it, I refer my readers to a well known principle of science, namely, *that all, who belong to the same species, have the same nature.* We always consider the actions of any part, certainly of any considerable part of a species, as indicating the character or nature of the whole. And why should we doubt the truth of this principle in relation to man's moral character, any more than in relation to his physical properties, or to the properties of any other order of creatures? In all our treatment of mankind, and in all our maxims of practical wisdom, we admit the principle, that *human nature*, as to its grand moral features, is at all times, and in all circumstances, the same. This is implied also in the fact, that the same precepts, motives, and restraints,—in a word, the same moral discipline has been found suitable and necessary in all ages.

But I do not stop here, but proceed to inquire, whether the *New Testament*, besides furnishing a new argument itself, does not give testimony to the soundness of the argument from the *Old*. The Psalmist, in Psalm xiv. liii. v. cxi. x. xxxvi. and Isaiah, ch. lix. describe the wicked-

ness which prevailed in their day.—“They are corrupt ; they have done abominable works ; there is none that doeth good. They are all gone aside, they are together become filthy ; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre. Their feet run to evil. Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity ; The way of peace they know not ;” &c. The objector says, these passages described the corruption of the Jews in times of great degeneracy, and cannot be considered as a just description of mankind generally. But how does the Apostle Paul treat the subject ? He takes these same passages, a thousand years afterwards, and applies them, as descriptive of the character of Jews and Gentiles. Rom. iii. 9, he says, referring to ch. i. and ii., “We have before proved both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, that *they* are *all* under sin ; as it is written,”—immediately introducing from the Old Testament the texts above quoted, as a true account of the character of mankind without exception ; then stating the end he had aimed at in making such a disclosure of the human character ; namely, “that *every mouth* may be stopped, and *all the world* become guilty before God ;” and then directly bringing us to his final conclusion, that “by the deeds of the law shall *no flesh* be justified in his sight.” It is a connected discourse,—an unbroken chain of reasoning. And unless the texts, which the Apostle here cites from the Old Testament, are justly applicable to the whole race of man, “both *Jews* and *Gentiles*,” and, in connexion with the preceding part of his Epistle, are actually meant by him, to be a description of “*all the world*,” “*no flesh*” being excepted ;—the whole reasoning of the Apostle is without force ; his conclusion is broader than his premises ; and the quotations he makes from the Scriptures are not only *no proofs* of what he wishes to establish, but

have no kind of relation to it. The point he labors to establish is, that "*both Jews and Gentiles*"—that "*all the world*" have such a character, that they cannot be justified by law. But what is their character?—It is that which is first described in the preceding part of the Epistle, and then in the passages cited from the Old Testament. "We have before proved *both Jews and Gentiles*, that they are all under sin, as it is written; *There is none that doeth good, no, not one. They are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable, &c.*" The Apostle manifestly cites these texts, for the very purpose of describing, still more particularly than he had done, the character of "*all the world.*"—It might indeed be thought from the first part of verse 19, "whatsoever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law," that the Apostle meant to apply what he had just before said, to *Jews only*. But this would hardly agree with the scope of the passage, which was to establish a general truth respecting "*all the world.*" Besides, the first part of v. 19 will easily admit a construction perfectly corresponding with the scope of the whole passage. The Apostle would prove that *all men* are under sin. The *Jews* would naturally make an exception in their own favor. He tells them that there can be no exception; that what he has quoted from *the law*, that is, from their own Scriptures, must certainly relate to *Jews*, as well as to *Gentiles*.—The quotations cannot relate to *Jews exclusively* of *Gentiles*, because that would not agree with the manner, already noticed, in which the quotations are introduced;—"We have proved *both Jews and Gentiles*, that they are *all* under sin; as it is written &c." Nor does it so obviously agree with the conclusion v. 19, which relates to "*all the world.*" Besides, it is difficult not to believe that the writer of some of the Psalms

quoted, particularly of the xiv, extended his views beyond his own nation, though he undoubtedly referred to that primarily, and in a special sense. When he introduces that description of wickedness, which is quoted by the Apostle, his language is general. "The Lord looked down from heaven, upon *the children of men*, to see if there were *any* that did understand." The Psalmist then proceeds to give a description, not, one would think, of the posterity of Abraham *solely*, but of *the children of men, the human race*, and says, *they are all gone aside*.—But we shall come ultimately to the same conclusion, if we admit that the passages were originally intended by the Psalmist to relate merely to his own nation. For if such a character belonged to that highly favored nation, it must of course have belonged to the rest of the world. So the Apostle decides when, many ages after, he attributes that description of character to *all the world*. On the same principle the passages quoted by him are applicable to *us*, as well as to those who lived in the time of Paul, or of David; as applicable to us, as what the Apostle says respecting justification, salvation, duty, or any thing else.

This manner of quoting texts from the Old Testament is not peculiar to Paul. We find frequent examples of it in the instructions of Christ himself. The Prophet Isaiah, chap. xxix. 13, had given the following description of the hypocrisy of the people, who were contemporary with him; viz. "that they drew near to God with their mouth, and honored him with their lips, but had removed their hearts far from him." Jesus quoted this passage as *applicable to the Jews in his day*. "Well did Esaias prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, &c." In the same manner Christ repeatedly quoted Isa.

vi. 9, 10, as a true description of the obstinate impiety of those, who rejected his gospel.

Now this manner of quoting and reasoning from Scripture, so often employed both by Christ and his apostles, clearly involves the principle, which I stated in answer to the objection ; viz. that *human nature*, in all ages and circumstances, is, *as to its grand moral features*, the same, and that the dispositions and actions, which mankind at any time exhibit, are real indications of what belongs to the *nature of man universally*. Unless this principle is admitted, how can the Apostle be justified in making such a use as he does, of his citations from the Old Testament ?—And to bring the subject nearer home, how can we make use of any thing which was said of the character of man, either in the Old Testament or the New, as appertaining to those who live at the present day ? Indeed, how can any of the declarations of the Bible, all of which were made so many ages ago, be of any use to us, except to gratify curiosity ? Whether, therefore, we consider the nature of the case, or the reasoning of the Apostle in Rom. iii. ; are we not warranted to receive, whatever the Bible in any part affirms respecting the dispositions or conduct of men, as applicable, *substantially*, to men in all ages ? If we are not, what can we say to vindicate the Apostle ? If we are, then the text I first quoted from Genesis, and those texts which are quoted from the Psalms in Rom. iii, and other similar texts in the Old Testament, do all illustrate the character, which now belongs to man. And when we read in the Bible, or elsewhere, the highest description of human wickedness in the old world, in Sodom, in Canaan, in Jerusalem, in Greece, Rome, or India, or of the wickedness of individuals, as Pharaoh, Saul, Jeroboam, Judas, or the Cæsars ; it is perfectly just and natu-

ral for us to reflect, *such is human nature*;—*such is man*. So that Orthodox writers, though they may not, in all instances, have attended sufficiently to the groundwork of their argument, do in fact reason in an unexceptionable manner, when they undertake to show what *human nature* is, from the description which is given of the wickedness of man in the Old Testament; and the objection to this reasoning, which I stated above, and which is, briefly, the objection of Dr. Turnbull and Dr. John Taylor, cannot be considered as valid.

Let me detain your attention a few moments, while I hint at the confirmation, which may be given to the general principle, asserted above, by an appeal to the sober convictions of men. They who are in the habit of comparing their moral affections and conduct with the perfect law of God, will have no difficulty in acknowledging, that they find, in the various representations of human depravity, contained in the Old Testament, a true picture of themselves. I say not that they are conscious of having committed sinful actions in *the same form*, or indulged sinful passions *in the same degree*, with all those, whose crimes are recorded in the Bible. This is not the case. But they are conscious of having in their hearts a wrong bias, a want of what the divine law requires, of the *same nature*, with that moral depravation, which has been exhibited by the greatest sinners. The sacred writers impute to various societies and individuals, pride, selfishness, idolatry, covetousness, impurity, revenge, falsehood, blasphemy. Have we not discovered in ourselves the root of all these vices? Should we not be liable to actual excess in every one of them, if we should be freed from restraints, and should follow, without any counteracting influence, the desires which naturally spring up in our hearts? And have not the great-

est proficient in self-government and holiness always been the most ready to make this humiliating confession? Even some of the heathen, who made serious attempts to improve their own character, were forced to acknowledge that the disorder of their nature was too stubborn to be subdued by them, without help from above.

It is certainly nothing conclusive against the principle contended for, that some men can be found, who are not sensible of its truth in relation to themselves. This may easily be accounted for, without in the least invalidating the principle. For they may be altogether inattentive to what passes in their own minds, and so may be ignorant of themselves; or if they are in some measure attentive to the operations of their own minds, they may fix their eye upon some of the wrong standards of duty which are set up in the world, and so may judge incorrectly. It is surely no uncommon thing for men to be insensible of the faults of their character, especially of the hidden affections of their hearts. This insensibility, so frequently described in the Scriptures, is a matter of common observation, and has always been regarded, as one of the greatest hindrances to the salutary influence of divine truth.

The argument from the Old Testament might be extended to great length, comprising all the positive declarations there made, and all the examples there exhibited, of human wickedness; all the confessions both of saints and sinners; all the means employed to subdue the moral corruption of men and hold them back from sin, and every thing else, which showed formerly, and which, consequently, always shows, *what is in man*. They who read the Old Testament with such views as the Apostles entertained respecting it, will be constantly improving their acquaintance with themselves,—their knowl-



edge of their own moral degradation, and their desire after that gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, which renews and exalts the soul.

## LETTER VI.

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS,

IN the last Letter, I confined myself almost entirely to the establishment of a general principle, and to the proof which, according to that principle, may be drawn from the Old Testament, in support of the doctrine of man's moral depravity. I might also refer to declarations which are general or universal, as Jeremiah xvii. 9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" "*The heart*," not of any man, or any society of men in particular; but of *man universally*. The next verse confirms this sense. "I the Lord search *the heart*;"—the same heart, as the one spoken of in v. 9; so that if, when the Prophet says, the Lord searches *the heart*, we are to understand him as meaning, that the Lord searches *the heart universally*, or *the heart of every human being*; then also, when in the closest connexion with this, he says, *the heart* is deceitful and wicked, we must understand him as meaning that *the heart universally*, or *the heart of every human being* is deceitful and wicked.—This is the only sense which any man can give the text, v. 9, who attends to its connexion with the following verse, or considers what language we commonly use to express a general or universal proposition. Another passage containing a universal proposition of like character, is found in Eccles. ix. 3. "*The heart of the sons of men* is full of evil."

But in the New Testament every thing is invested with clearer light. Here we find evidence, exhibited in many different forms, that *man*, as a *species*, that the *human kind*, is sunk in sin, and while unrenewed, entirely destitute of holiness, and unfit for heaven. This evidence I shall now lay before you, though it must be with great brevity, and in reference only to a few passages.

The first passage, to which I would call your attention, is found in the discourse of Jesus with Nicodemus, John iii. 1—7. This conversation took place near the beginning of Christ's ministry. About four thousand years had passed away, from the fall of man. Those four thousand years had furnished no small evidence of the human character. The corruption and violence of the old world had been seen. And notwithstanding the tremendous purgation, which the world underwent by the general deluge, it had been seen, that the new race, descending from righteous Noah, pursued the same downward course with the generations before the flood. The same had been the case with the posterity of Abraham. Although various and powerful means had been used to restrain men from wickedness and induce them to serve God, they had in every nation, and in every age, shown themselves prone to evil. Jesus knew what display had been made of the human character in every period of the world. He knew what was in *man*. The grand result of what his all searching eye had seen, and then saw, of the affections and conduct of the human race, he expressed to Nicodemus; "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The moral renovation here spoken of, is represented as necessary for all men. *Εαν μη τις γεννηθῇ ἀνωθεν*. It is said of *any one*. The sense is, that *no man*, *no human being*, who is not the subject of this renovation, can be a partaker of

the benefits of Christ's kingdom. The necessity of this renovation, as appears afterwards, arises from the character which man possesses, in consequence of his *natural birth*. Of course, it is necessary for every child of Adam. "That which is born of the flesh, is *flesh*." "By *flesh*," says Rosenmuller, with evident propriety, and in agreement with commentators generally, "is meant the nature of man,—man with all his moral imperfection, subject to the dominion of his bodily appetites. And he who is born of parents, who have this moral imperfection, is like his parents." All the children of men are here represented as having, by their very birth, a moral nature, which renders them incapable of enjoying the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom, unless they are *born again*. This interpretation is confirmed by all those texts, in which the word *σὰρξ*, or *σαρκίς*, *flesh*, or *fleshly*, is used to express the opposite of that which is spiritual or holy. The metaphorical expression, being *born again*, must denote a *moral change*, because it is a change that fits men for a *moral or spiritual kingdom*. If we view this passage in connexion with those, which represent repentance and conversion, as necessary to prepare men for Christ's kingdom, we shall see that being *born again* denotes a change of the same general character with *repentance and conversion*. It is then clear, that this passage of Scripture, interpreted according to just rules, contains the following sentiment ;—that *all men, without exception, are by nature*, or in consequence of their natural birth, in such a state of moral impurity, as disqualifies them for the enjoyments of heaven, unless they are renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Rom. v. 12. "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that *all have sinned*." Although this

text must be allowed to be, in some respects, very obscure; two things are perfectly clear. 1. That the Apostle considered sin, as *the cause of death*, or the reason why God sent into the world the evils involved in the word *death*. 2. That as sin is the *cause of death*, the extent of the one may be measured by the extent of the other. Determine how far *death* extends, and you determine how far *sin* extends. If a part of the human species die, a part are sinners. If all die, all are sinners. "Death passed upon all men, *for that* all have sinned." Εφ' ὧ, according to the judgment of the most eminent critics, and the use of the phrase elsewhere in the New Testament, means the same as διότι, eo quod, quia,—*for that*, or *because*. The Vulgate renders it, in quo, in whom; from which some have thought the Apostle meant to assert, that it is *in Adam* that all men have sinned, so that his transgression becomes theirs by imputation. But I see nothing in the passage, or in the nature of the subject, which can justify such an interpretation.

On this particular point, our opinions have been often misrepresented. We are said to hold, *that God dooms a whole race of innocent creatures to destruction, or considers them all as deserving destruction, for the sin of one man*. Now when I examine the respectable writings of the earlier Calvinists generally, on the subject of original sin, I find nothing which resembles such a statement as this. It is true, exceptionable language has in some instances been used, and opinions, which I should think erroneous, have sometimes been entertained on this subject. But the Orthodox in New England, at the present day, are not chargeable with the same fault. The *imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity*, in any sense, which those words naturally and properly convey, is a

doctrine which we do not believe. If any shall say, as Stapfer does, who refers to Vitringa and other reformed divines, as agreeing with him,—that “for God to give Adam a posterity *like himself*, and to *impute* his sin to them, is one and the same thing;” I should not object to such an imputation. For I see not how any man, who has a serious regard to scripture, or to fact, or considers what are the laws of our nature, can hesitate to admit, that God has given Adam a posterity like himself.

But the word *imputation* has, in my view, been improperly used in relation to this subject, and has occasioned unnecessary perplexity. In scripture, the word, *impute*, signifies uniformly, if I mistake not, charging or reckoning to a man that which is his own attribute or act. Every attempt, which has been made, to prove that God ever imputes to man any sinful disposition or act, which is not strictly *his own*, has, in my judgment, failed of success. And as it is one object of these Letters, to make you acquainted with the real opinions of the Orthodox in New England; I would here say, with the utmost frankness, that we are not perfectly satisfied with the language used on this subject, in the Assembly's Catechism. Though we hold that Catechism, taken as a whole, in the highest estimation; we could not, with a good conscience, subscribe to every expression it contains in relation to the doctrine of original sin. Hence it is common for us, when we declare our assent to the Catechism, to do it with an express or implied restriction. We receive the Catechism *generally*, as containing a summary of the principles of Christianity. But that the sinfulness of our natural, fallen state consists, in any measure, “in the guilt of Adam's first sin,” is what we cannot admit, without more convincing evidence. But we think we have the best reason for believing that, in

respect of *character*, there is a connexion between Adam and the whole human race. Nor do we, as the Author of this Sermon seems to think, rest this opinion on "a few slight hints about the fall of our first parents," but upon the plain, and reiterated declaration of the Apostle Paul, Rom. v. Notwithstanding all the difficulty with which this passage is attended, one point is plain. The writer makes it known, in different forms of expression, and with the greatest perspicuity, that a connexion really exists between the father of the human race, and all his children. Unless Adam's transgression had, in the plan of the divine administration, such a relation to his posterity, that in consequence of it, they were constituted sinners, and subjected to death and all other sufferings, as penal evils; the Apostle reasons inconclusively, and entirely misses the end he aims at, in his comparison of Adam and Christ. Nothing can be more obvious, according to the common rules of interpretation, than that he meant to assert this connexion; so that, if no such connexion exists, he had the misfortune to publish a mistake.

Though it would not be consistent with the plan of these Letters to collect the various passages of the New Testament, which prove what man's native character is; I cannot willingly leave the subject without adverting again to the manner, in which the Apostle Paul was accustomed to treat it. From a great multitude of pertinent texts, I take one. Eph. ii. 3. "Among whom also we all had our conversation, &c. and were *by nature children of wrath, even as others.*" He says this of believing *Jews*, as is evident from the beginning and the close of the verse, in connexion with the context. To be *children of wrath*, according to Schleusner, Rosenmuller, Koppe, and others, is to be *worthy of punishment*, *pœnis*

divinis digni. To be children of wrath, *φύσει, by nature,* is to be *born so*, or to be so in consequence of our birth, or in consequence of our *natural disposition*. "Ob naturalem hostram indolem." See Schleusner's *Lex.* on this text. Compare Gal. ii. 15, "We who are Jews *by nature*," i. e. *born Jews, or Jews by birth*. Schleusner says that, according to the whole scope of the discourse, Ep. ii. *φύσις, nature*, signifies the *state of those who had not been instructed and reformed by the christian religion*. True. But why was that state called *φύσις, nature*?—a word which points us to our *origin, nativity, birth*.—We shall see the reason of this, if we compare this text with the passage, quoted above, from John iii. "That which is *born of the flesh*, is *flesh*;" a declaration fairly capable of no meaning but this, that man possesses *by his natural birth a depraved disposition, corrupt desires*, as the word *flesh* signifies in the text now under consideration, Eph. ii. 3, and in every other place, where it relates to the moral character or conduct of men. That which is born of the flesh, of that which man has by nature, is such a temper or character, that according to the Apostle, he is a *child of wrath*;—such, according to the representation of Christ, that he must be the subject of a *new birth by the spirit*, or he cannot see the kingdom of God.—This must be the meaning of these two passages taken together, unless we are driven by our dislike of the doctrine contained in them, to violate the plainest rules of interpretation. If similar phraseology should be found on any other subject; if, for example, it should be said, that which is born of *human parents* is *human*, or that which is born of *man* is *frail and liable to decay*,—and that every man is *by nature* the subject of various appetites and passions; who would not understand these phrases, as denoting what man is, or what he has, *by his birth*, or

what is *inbred*, or *native*? Or if language should be used by an inspired writer expressing in the same way, that which is opposite to what we understand by this text; that is, if it should be said, that the children of men are *by nature pure*,—or that what is born of human parents is *virtuous and holy*; would not our opposers think such a passage a proof sufficiently clear, of the *native purity*, the *original, inbred virtue of man*? And would they not be greatly “amazed” at the attempt of any man to put a different sense upon it?

That the human species is universally, while unrenewed, in a state of entire moral corruption, is implied in the invariable practice of the Apostles, wherever they went, to call upon men, according to their divine commission,—“upon all men every where to *repent*.” The duty, and necessity of repentance, which denotes a radical moral change, was inculcated on all, to whom the Gospel was proclaimed. If, in any part of the world, an Apostle found *human beings*, he instantly took it for granted, that they were children of disobedience, and children of wrath, and treated them accordingly,—just as he took it for granted that they were mortal.—All the provisions of the Gospel are adapted to those, who are polluted and guilty. If any can be found, whether old or young, who are not the subjects of moral depravity and ruin, they are evidently excluded from any concern with those provisions.—When we pursue the history of the christian religion through the days of the Apostles, we find wherever it produced its genuine effects, it produced *repentance and fruits meet for repentance*;—it formed men, whoever they were, to a new character; so that it became universally true, that if *any man* was a Christian, he was *a new creature*, or in the language of Christ, was *born again*. We find no instance of the



contrary. The character, which St. Paul gives of the followers of Christ, implies that they had, without exception, been *renewed*. He often turns their thoughts to their former state of degradation and ruin. He paints that state in the strongest colors. He illustrates it by the most striking metaphors. He reminds believers, that before their regeneration, they were servants of sin, dead in trespasses and sins, enemies to God, impure, earthly. He speaks of this moral corruption, not as a fact, which was local, or of limited extent, but universal. And accordingly, he makes it a part of the general system of Christian doctrine.

There is a difficulty, I well know, in applying the description, given by the Apostle, of the character, which the first converts to Christianity originally possessed, to men of the present day, whose exterior character has been formed under the influence of a Christian education. But this difficulty disappears, when we attend to the principle, which the Apostle recognises in his reasoning, Rom. iii, and which I have already endeavored to illustrate; namely; that, whatever difference may exist, as to outward character, *all men have the same natural disposition, the same original ingredients of moral character*. In conformity to this principle, we pass by what is merely regular and amiable in the eye of the world; we pass by all the diversities of exterior character, and look to the grand moral affections of the heart, in which all are alike. Agreeably to this view, and agreeably to what our Savior says as to sin in the heart, Matt. v. 21, 22, 28, it would appear that, although men have not openly, or by formal acts, made themselves idolaters, thieves, adulterers, and murderers; they do, in a greater or less degree, possess those very passions, or desires, which, if indulged and acted out, would make them so. And thus we shall have the happiness of

agreeing with the Author of the sermon now before us, who in another ordination sermon, gives the following just description of the character of the human species.—“To whom is the minister of the gospel sent to preach? To men of upright minds, disposed to receive and obey the truth, which guides to heaven? Ah no! He is called to guide a wandering flock;—he is sent to a *world of sinners*, in whose hearts lurk *idolatry, sensuality, pride, and every corruption.*”\*

Men, who assert the native purity of human beings, insist much upon the harmlessness and tender sensibilities of little children, before they are corrupted by example, and also upon the existence of what are called the natural affections in mankind generally. But how can those things, which man possesses in common with irrational animals, or those, which necessarily appertain to his present mode of existence, and which remain the same, whatever character he sustains, be considered as evidence of the purity of his moral nature?

The attempt, often made, to account for the universal prevalence of sin, by the influence of example, without supposing any native bias to evil, cannot afford satisfaction. For we are still pressed with the difficulty of accounting for it, that children, whose nature is untainted with moral evil, should be disposed to imitate bad examples, rather than good ones,—to neglect their duty, rather than perform it; and that all discreet parents and instructors, who have any familiar acquaintance with the youthful mind, should be led to frame their whole system of instruction and discipline, upon the principle, that children are *prone to evil, inclined to go astray*. Any plan of education, whether domestic or public, which should overlook this principle, and involve the opposite one of man's *native purity*, would be regarded by

\* Sermon at the Ordination of the Rev. J. Codman.

all men of sober experience and sober judgment, as romantic and dangerous.

But I must bring my remarks on this subject to a close. My object was to show that we receive the doctrine of man's native corruption upon its own proper evidence, as we receive any other truth; and that it is totally unphilosophical and unscriptural, to suffer this evidence to be obscured or perplexed by the inquiry, how the doctrine can be reconciled with the moral perfection of God. Both the moral perfection of God, and the doctrine of human depravity, rest upon evidence, which is, in our view, perfectly conclusive. We believe them both, and believe them entirely consistent with each other. Indeed, we see no peculiar difficulty attending their consistency. If any one asserts, that our doctrine of man's depravity and the moral perfection of God are inconsistent with each other; it will behove him to show, in what respects, and for what reasons, they are inconsistent. He ought to show too, how it is any more inconsistent with the goodness of God, for men to be corrupt in the earliest period of their existence, than in any subsequent period; or for all men to be corrupt, than for any part of them; or for men to be corrupt in a higher degree, than in a lower degree. If, from a consideration of the divine goodness, or for other reasons, any should persist in denying the doctrine of *man's native depravity*; they will easily see what a task they take upon themselves. They must first make it appear, by a thorough investigation, conducted in conformity to just and allowed principles, that none of the texts of Scripture, which I have cited, and no others of a similar character, contain the doctrine. In addition to this, they must satisfactorily account for all the corruption and wickedness, which man has exhibited, from childhood to

old age, in all nations and circumstances, and in opposition to all the means which have been used to restrain him, without admitting that his *nature is prone to evil*;—a task, I should think, of the same kind, with that of accounting for all the phenomena of the natural world, by which the Newtonian philosophy proves the law of gravitation, without admitting that law.

## LETTER VII.

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS,

Unitarian writers generally, as well as the Author of the Sermon before us, have appeared to think, that the commonly received doctrine of *Election* is totally incompatible with the goodness of God, and that our believing that doctrine is proof sufficient, that we do not believe in the divine goodness.

To this subject, though not a very popular one, I hope you will attend with that candor and unprejudiced judgment, without which, as you must have often seen in others, all inquiry after the truth is in vain. Against the doctrine of the Reformed Churches, now to be considered, there are strong prepossessions. And I am free to acknowledge, that Orthodox writers and preachers of high repute, but deficient in judgment, have, in some instances, exhibited the doctrine in a manner, which has given too much occasion for these prepossessions;—and too much occasion for this Author, and many others, to think that the doctrine is inconsistent with the moral perfection of God. I wish you, therefore, distinctly to understand, that it is not the doctrine of *Election*, as stated by some of its injudicious

advocates, or as understood by its opposers, that I would now defend.

This subject, as it respects a principle of the divine administration, is not only a very important one, but one which obviously involves questions of difficult and profound investigation. It respects the administration of a Being, possessed of infinite understanding, and infinite holiness,—a Being, to whom we have no right to dictate, and of whom we have no cause to complain,—a Being, before whose supreme majesty, we are nothing, and less than nothing. Though I have a heart as lofty, and vain, and presumptuous as others; yet when I bring this subject before me, and consider that I have undertaken to inquire respecting the administration of the eternal, incomprehensible God, my Sovereign, and my Judge,—I stand in awe; I check my presumption; and resolve to hold my mind in a humble, docile frame, lest I should incur that appalling rebuke of the Apostle,—“Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?” I bid myself remember, that neither my opinions, nor those of any mortal, are entitled to regard, any farther than they agree with the truths of revelation, and that, whatever my opinions or wishes may be, those truths will remain the same. I would devoutly cherish the impression that no opinions can be right, which would make any part of Scripture unwelcome to me; and that the greatest dislike of men, which may be incurred by defending the doctrines of revelation, is not worthy to be named, in comparison with the frown of my final Judge, for rejecting those doctrines.

It is generally acknowledged by Christians, that no opinion or reasoning respecting the divine character, or administration, can be relied upon, except that which rests on the declarations of Scripture. On this subject

especially, not the least respect is due to any argument, however plausible, which, on careful inquiry, is found contrary to what God has taught us in his word, or to what takes place in his providence. The object of our present inquiry is then very simple. If it were put to my natural reason to judge, by its own light, respecting what is called the doctrine of Election; my judgment might agree with the judgment of those, who reject the doctrine. If the question were, what difficulties attend the doctrine; I might perhaps bring forward as many as others. And if the question were, whether the doctrine, as generally represented by its opposers, and even by the Author of this Sermon, is according to the word of God; I should answer, as they do, in the negative. But the proper question is, *what saith the Scripture?* What does God teach us, as to the manner in which he designates those, who are to be heirs of salvation?

I shall not go largely into a consideration of the evidence from Scripture, in support of the doctrine now under consideration; but shall merely proceed far enough to show, that we do not believe the doctrine without evidence, and that our believing it is not a proof of our denying the moral perfection of God, but a consequence of our reverence for his word.

*Proof of the doctrine of Election.*

I find that Jesus Christ often speaks of a part of mankind, as being given him of the Father. This he does several times in John xvii. As an example of the whole, verse 2 may be taken. "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." The sense is, *that the Father has given to Christ a part of the human race, and that those, who have thus been given to Christ, are the persons who shall have eternal life.* As to the meaning of the

passage, the only question that deserves a moment's consideration, is, whether it relates to all who shall finally be saved, or merely to those who were disciples of Christ at that time.—In favor of the larger sense, there are several arguments.

1. Christ is here speaking of his general commission and work, as a Savior. He tells us, that the Father has given him power over *all flesh*, without the least intimation of any limits. And for what purpose was he endued with this extensive power? "That he might give eternal life to *as many as the Father had given him.*" His work, as a Savior, and the power committed to him did in fact extend, not merely to those who were then his disciples, but to the whole number of the redeemed. But why should he speak of his *power* in this extensive sense, if he meant that the end to be accomplished by it should be understood in so limited a sense? No limits are suggested. Why then should we not understand the phrase, "as many as thou hast given him," to denote all, to whom Christ will actually give eternal life?

2. The context shows, that Christ, in the prayer here recited, had his eye upon all, who should be saved in future ages. v. 20. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also, who shall believe on me through their word." There can be no reason to doubt, that he had as large an extent of views in the second verse, as in the twentieth.

3. This interpretation receives additional confirmation from a similar passage in John vi. 37, 39. "All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me; and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.—And this is the Father's will who sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it

up again at the last day." Those who *are given* to Christ, and those who *shall come* to Christ, are here identified. Indeed, the passage plainly signifies, that, in every case, a person's being given to Christ *secures* his coming to Christ; a circumstance which fixes one point; namely; that those, who will finally be saved, are given to Christ *before* they come to him.—From v. 39, we have additional proof that, when Christ speaks of those, who were given him of the Father, he includes the whole number that shall be saved. "This is the Father's will,—that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day." The work of Christ, as a Savior, doubtless extends alike to all, who shall be raised to eternal life at the last day. But this work of his is here represented as relating to those, whom the Father had given him. From the whole it seems evident, that when Christ speaks so familiarly, in John xvii, of those who were given him, he refers to all who shall be saved.

But even on supposition, that the language related to those only, who were then his disciples; the argument would still be the same, because the principle would be the same. There could be no reason, why the Father should give Christ those, who were saved by him during his life, and not those who should be saved afterwards; and no reason, why being given to Christ should stand in certain connexion with salvation in one case, and not in the other.

If we should examine other texts of similar import, we should find still more abundant proof of what is so evident from the two passages above cited; namely; *that the Father has given a portion of mankind to Christ, in a peculiar sense, and in distinction from others, and that Christ will actually bestow eternal life on all who have been thus given him.* I see not how any man can give a dif-



ferent sense to the texts alluded to, without being conscious that he is driven to it, by his prepossession against this doctrine.

Pursuing the single inquiry, *what the scriptures teach*, we find several passages, which speak, with a remarkable emphasis, of a *purpose and choice of God* respecting those, who will be saved. My limits will allow me to consider only two.

The apostle says to the Ephesians, ch. i. 3—11, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ; *according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, &c. ; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace*,—in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, *being predestinated according to the purpose of him, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*” Here we are taught, that God has a *purpose, choice, will, and good pleasure*, respecting those who are saved. It is such a *purpose*, that when men are saved, they are saved *according to it*. It is a *purpose or choice*, which was in the mind of God, *before they were saved, and before they existed*. They were “chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.” And it is a *purpose*, which does not rest upon any personal merit in those, who are its objects. The *purpose or choice* is here repeatedly represented as a matter of *grace*, as *according to the riches of grace*;—exactly in agreement with other passages, which exclude *all works of righteousness* from having any concern in this subject.

The other passage I shall particularly notice, is Rom. ix, 11—24. In verses 11, 12, 13, it is said; “For

the children," that is, Jacob and Esau, "being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said unto her, the elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." It is beyond all doubt in my mind, that this interesting passage was meant to be understood in a *national* sense ; that is, that they respected Jacob and Esau, not personally, but as the heads of two tribes or nations ; or, in other words, that they respected those two nations. It is apparent too, that what is quoted from Moses, v. 15 ; " I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion," was said originally respecting a part of the Israelitish nation in the wilderness. But it is equally clear, that the apostle makes use of the divine conduct respecting the posterity of Jacob and Esau, mentioned in v. 11, 12, 13, and the declaration of God, quoted in v. 15, as illustrative of a general principle in the divine administration. This principle is brought into view, v. 16, as an inference from what preceded. " So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." It is deduced, as a general principle, from what God said respecting the offending Israelites in a particular case. This mode of reasoning is repeated immediately after. First, a passage is quoted from the Old Testament ; v. 17 ; " For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, even for this same cause have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth." From this declaration of God respecting a single individual, a general conclusion is drawn, v. 18. " Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he

will he hardeneth." This is laid down by the apostle, as a general principle of the divine administration. And it is this general principle, that is asserted in the orthodox doctrine of Election, or sovereign grace.

Now take a brief view of this remarkable passage, What is it that the apostle takes so much pains to establish? Evidently this, that God makes distinctions among men, or bestows peculiar favors on some, and not on others, *pro libitu, pro arbitrio, according to his own will, or pleasure.\** How does he prove this? From *particular instances* of the divine conduct, as made known by the Scriptures. It is for this purpose he quotes what God said respecting his treatment of Jacob and Esau, and of Pharaoh. Taken in any other view, the quotations have no relation to the subject, and the reasoning of the apostle from them is nugatory.

But how can the apostle infer a general truth from particular facts? How can he infer what the divine purpose and conduct will generally be, respecting the higher distinctions to be made among men in the concerns of religion, from what they were towards a few individuals in regard to other distinctions?—Plainly, because, as he evidently understands it, the same principle is involved in both. The truth asserted in v. 16, is *general*. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." The sense is, that, in relation to the subject under consideration, "nothing is effected by the efforts of man, but that every thing depends on the mercy of God.†" This general truth is inferred from what God said respecting his conduct in a particular case, because that case im-

\* See Schleusner, Rosenmuller, and other Commentators, on the place.

† Rosenmuller.

plied the same principle. What objection can lie against this argument? If God proceeded in the manner described, in his treatment of two nations, that is, made a distinction between them by his own sovereign purpose and act; he may surely proceed in the same manner towards individuals. And if he has actually proceeded in this manner and on this principle, in his treatment of particular individuals; why may he not proceed in the same manner in his treatment of others generally? That the Apostle reasons thus, is undeniable.

It may be made still more certain, that we understand this passage correctly, by looking at the objection, which the Apostle supposed would be made. "Thou wilt say then unto me, why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?" v. 19. The nature of the objection, proves, that it related to that very doctrine of God's sovereign purpose and agency, which makes a part of our faith. It is the very objection, which is still made against that doctrine. The nature of the objection shows the nature of the doctrine, against which it was urged. And the nature of the answer, v. 20—24, shows, still more plainly, what was the nature of the objection, and the nature of the doctrine objected to. It is exactly the answer, which it is suitable to give to one, who urges just such an objection as this, against the Orthodox doctrine of God's sovereign purpose and agency. Such a striking correspondence would, in any other case, and must in this, be considered, as affording very satisfactory evidence of the scope and meaning of the discourse.

There is one more important inquiry respecting this passage; and that is, whether that general principle of the divine administration, which the Apostle establishes, relates to the eternal interests of men, or to something of less moment. Now I think nothing can be plainer,

than the correctness of the common construction of the passage, viz ; that it relates to the difference which exists among men with regard to their spiritual and eternal state. This appears from the commencement of this particular part of the discourse, v. 6, 7, 8, in which the Apostle brings into view the essential difference between *real Israelites*, and those who are *of Israel*, that is, descended from him ;—between the children of the flesh, and the children of God. The Apostle labors throughout the discourse, to illustrate the manner, in which this difference is made, drawing his illustrations, as was natural, when reasoning with Jews, from the Jewish Scriptures. That he refers to the difference which is made among men in relation to their religious character and salvation, is evident also from v. 22, 23 &c, where, in pursuance of the selfsame subject, which was treated v. 6—18, he speaks of the vessels of mercy, prepared for glory, in contradistinction to the vessels of wrath ; of those who were called, both Jews and Gentiles, of God's people, &c.

If still further confirmation of the correctness of the reasoning above exhibited were necessary, I could, as I think, make it appear, that the doctrine of God's sovereign Election is the only doctrine, which accounts satisfactorily for the actual difference, which exists between true believers, and the rest of the world.

But if, after all, any should be disposed to urge the common objections against this doctrine, that it makes God unrighteous, and that, if it is true, we cannot be blamed for our sins ; I would, for the present, refer them to this chapter, to learn how the Apostle Paul would answer their objections.

The doctrine, we are now considering, is in my apprehension, clearly implied in the general doctrine of the divine purpose. That God has a wise and holy plan,

and that all events take place in conformity to it, is not only taught, expressly and abundantly, in the Scriptures, but results from the absolute perfection of God, and from the necessary dependence of all created things on him, as clearly, as any mathematical truth results from its premises. But if God has a general plan or design respecting the events which take place, he must surely have one respecting so important an event, as the salvation of his people.

But I can proceed no further with the proof. This subject has been argued by the ablest writers, that have appeared since the christian era. The controversy has been wrought up to such a degree of warmth, and the doctrine is associated in the minds of not a few, with so many strange and absurd notions, that it has become a matter of difficulty and hazard for a man to offer any proof in its favor, or even to profess that he believes it. Indeed, a man in some instances, can hardly find himself at liberty simply to repeat the texts of Scripture, which support the doctrine, without being attacked with a score of common place reflections, intended to put down the doctrine at once, without discussion. I trust my readers will be sensible, that the state of mind, which is exhibited in such cases, is altogether at variance with Christian candor, and in a high degree unpropitious to the cause of truth.

## LETTER VIII.

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS,

THOUGH I have detained you longer than I intended, on the doctrine of Election; I must beg your indulgence, while I express my thoughts without reserve, on various incorrect views and representations of the doctrine, and on some of the difficulties attending it.

Orthodox writers have not unfrequently made use of expressions which, at first view, may seem to furnish occasion for some of the heavy charges, brought against us by our opposers. But let it be remembered, that, for the rash, unqualified expressions of men, who have become hot and violent by controversy, we are not to be held responsible. We here enter our solemn protest against the language which has sometimes been employed, and the conceptions which have sometimes been entertained on this subject, or rather, perhaps, against the appendages, which have been attached to it, by men, who have been denominated Calvinists. Though we embrace the doctrine, as one which is taught in Scripture, and which corresponds with enlightened reason and Christian piety; we do not embrace it in the form, and with the appendages, to which I allude.—But my present concern is chiefly with the representations of our opposers.

First. It is often represented, that we believe in an *arbitrary, unconditional, absolute decree of election*. These words are used abundantly by opposers of the doctrine, and are made the means of exciting many prejudices against it. This representation of the doctrine must receive particular attention.

The word *arbitrary* has acquired a bad sense ; and is now understood to express the character of a master or ruler, who is tyrannical, or oppressive ; who acts without regard to reason or justice, and is governed by his own capricious will. God's purpose respecting the salvation of men is, in our view, at the greatest distance from any thing like this. We consider the purpose of God to be altogether as just and reasonable, as his administration. If, in the actual *salvation* of the penitent and holy, God is wise and good ; he is equally wise and good, in his *purpose* to save them,—his conduct being an exact accomplishment of his purpose. No objection, therefore, can lie against the previous purpose of his will, which does not lie equally against the acts of his government. The inquiry, then, respects a matter of fact. Does God *act* wisely and benevolently in saving sinners ? Or does he act from a capricious, tyrannical will ? If the actions of his government are capricious and tyrannical, so is his purpose. If his actions are wise and good, his purpose is so likewise. Now although in various respects, God's proceedings in saving sinners are inscrutable to us, and we are unable to see by what reasons he is influenced ; we believe he has reasons, which are perfectly satisfactory to himself, and which, were they made known, would be satisfactory to us. It is utterly impossible, that a Being of infinite perfection should act under the influence of a capricious or despotic will. Though his administration may often be contrary to our judgment and our expectations ; we confide implicitly in his wisdom and goodness. Nothing can be more suitable for us, than such confidence in our all perfect Creator.

I say then, we do not hold the doctrine of Election in any such sense, as implies, that the purpose of God is



*despotic or capricious.* It is indeed often represented in Scripture to be the purpose of his *will*, and to be according to his *good pleasure*. But what can be more wise and reasonable, than the *will* or *good pleasure* of God? When the inspired writers declare the purpose of God to be according to *his own will*, they do, it is granted, signify to us, that it varies from the will of *man*; but they do this, to show its superior wisdom and goodness. If it were according to the will of *man*, it would be marked only with *human* wisdom. But as it is according to the will of *God*, it is marked with *divine* wisdom.

We inquire next, whether the purpose of God respecting the salvation of men, is *unconditional and absolute*. I know that, in consequence of particular errors which have prevailed, it has been so represented by many of its advocates. But the language is certainly liable to be misunderstood, and ought not to be used without special care. Why should we employ words, which will not convey, truly and exactly, to the minds of others, the views which we ourselves entertain? Here, as before, I look at the divine conduct in saving sinners, considering that, as exactly corresponding with the previous divine purpose. And my inquiry is,—does God actually save sinners *unconditionally*? The first answer I give to this is, that God would never have saved them, had not Christ interposed, and made an atonement. This, then, is a *condition* of human salvation; it is the grand event, on account of which God forgives. But I inquire farther; does God actually save sinners, that is, forgive them, and receive them into his kingdom, without any condition *on their part*? The Bible furnishes the answer. “Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” He that believeth shall be saved.” This is the uniform representation of the Bible. The

condition of eternal life *to be performed by men*, is repentance, faith, obedience. They can no more be saved without these, than without the death of Christ. These conditions, it is true, are of a different nature from the atonement; but they are equally necessary. From this view of the subject, I come to a satisfactory conclusion. If God does not actually save sinners without conditions; he did not *purpose* to save them without conditions,—his purpose and conduct always agreeing exactly with each other. In his eternal purpose, he regarded *the same conditions*, and regarded them *in the same manner*, as he does now, when he saves. Clearly, then, the purpose of God to save men cannot, in this respect, be considered as *unconditional*. And as the word is apt to be understood as excluding all regard to these conditions, and being so understood, involves a palpable and dangerous error; the use of it ought, I think, to be avoided; except when the particular error to be confuted, or some other circumstances, will show plainly, that it is used in a sense agreeable to the truth.

But the principal object of Orthodox writers in using the word *unconditional* in this case, has been the *denial of a particular error*. Some men have asserted, that the divine purpose respecting the salvation of sinners, which is so often spoken of in Scripture, is grounded altogether on the foreknowledge of the good works of those, who are destined to salvation; and have, in this view, called the purpose of God *conditional*. Orthodox writers have denied *such a conditionality* as this, and have justified themselves by appealing to such texts, as the following; 2. Tim. i. 9, "God hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ before the world began." Tit. iii. 5.

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.” God’s saving us according to his purpose and grace is here contradistinguished to his saving us according to our works; and the defenders of Orthodoxy have justly considered all such representations of Scripture, as opposed to the opinion, that the divine purpose is conditional in the sense above mentioned.

To remove all appearances of inconsistency between the two different views above taken, of the meaning and propriety of the word *unconditional*, in relation to this subject, it is only necessary to make two obvious remarks. 1. Those things, which are spoken of as conditions on the part of man, are not so, in any degree, in the sense of *merit*, and therefore take nothing from the freeness or riches of divine grace. 2. That which is referred to in the passages above cited, where all conditionality is excluded, appears evidently to be the act of God in the first renewal of the sinner, or in first saving him from sin. “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works,” &c. It was the *commencement* of the work of God in salvation. So in the parallel text, in Titus. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” The *salvation* here spoken of, as excluding all consideration of works, was the act of God in *regeneration*,—*the renewing of the Holy Ghost*. This point is made still clearer by Ephes. ii, 4—10. Accordingly, we hold it as a fact, universally, that impenitent, unrenewed sinners do no good work, which God regards as a condition of their being renewed, or on account of which he has promised them regeneration;—that, in all cases, he calls and renews them,

according to his own purpose and grace. Now if his merciful act in their renewal to holiness is, *in this sense, unconditional* ; so is his previous purpose. That the one is so, is as certain and unexceptionable, as that the other is.

Such are my views, and, if I mistake not, of my brethren generally, respecting this part of the subject. But whenever we speak of the forgiveness of sin, the comforts of religion, or any other blessings, which God has promised to bestow, as tokens of his favor to his children, whether here or hereafter ; we are led, by the tenor of Scripture, to understand them as promised, not only on the ground of ~~the~~ perfect atonement made by the Savior of sinners, but also in view of conditions to be performed by them.

After the foregoing explanations, and similar ones from others, I hope the doctrine we hold respecting the purpose of God in the election of his people, or his agency in their salvation, will no longer be represented as implying, that God, in this respect, bears any resemblance to a capricious, arbitrary, or despotic ruler. Although some Orthodox writers may have inadvertently used language, which might lead to such a view of the character of God ; yet that view is totally repugnant to our feelings, and to every thing which our doctrine is intended to contain. God does, indeed, plainly possess the *uncontrollable power* of an absolute monarch ; but his uncontrollable power is always directed by infinite wisdom and goodness. Like a despotic sovereign, he does indeed act according to *his own will* ; but his will, be it remembered, is the will of a wise and benevolent ruler, a friend to his subjects ; and his acting in all things according to his own will, instead of being a cause of dissatisfaction and alarm, is the greatest possible security

to the interests of the universe. Like an absolute monarch, God may also frequently act, without any apparent reasons. But in reality there is no part of his administration, for which the highest and best reasons do not exist in his own mind.

Now the danger of representing the character and administration of God by the language, which is commonly applied to the character and administration of an absolute earthly sovereign, is, that the similitude, which is intended, and which really exists, will be carried too far; that instead of being restricted to those points in which a similitude would be honourable to God, it will be understood as reaching those, in which a similitude would be a stain to his perfect character. The words despot, monarch, absolute, and arbitrary were not originally and necessarily expressive of any bad qualities. *Despot* signifies a master, a prince who rules with unlimited power; *monarch*, one who exercises power or authority alone; *absolute*, complete, unlimited; *arbitrary*, according to one's own will. They all admit of a good sense; and, in truth, they would never be understood by us in a bad sense, had they not become associated in our minds with the bad qualities of those earthly masters or rulers, to whom they have been applied. But in consequence of this association, we cannot safely apply them, or others like them, to God, without special care to limit the points of analogy, which are intended. And in most cases of the kind, even this precaution would not preclude all exposure to error; because the words having acquired a bad sense, cannot be applied to any one, not even to God, whatever care may be used, without danger of conveying more or less of that bad sense to our minds. I should therefore, think it unadvised, in any common case, to make use of such terms, as those

abovementioned, in describing the character, or administration of God.

It is said by our opposers, that the doctrine we maintain on this subject, makes God *unjust*.

As to this charge of injustice, which is always meant to relate to those, who are not chosen to salvation, the views which we entertain, and which appear to me very satisfactory, are briefly these. The Scriptures teach, that all men are sinners, and, as such, children of wrath; that if God should be strict to mark iniquity, no man could stand before him; that salvation, in all instances, is of grace. Now suppose salvation is not granted to all. Suppose it not granted to any. Is God *unjust*?—unjust in not vouchsafing to men that, to which they have no claim? unjust in inflicting the evil, which they deserve? The divine *law* then is unjust. For how can the law be just in threatening an evil, which may not be justly inflicted? Further. If we should say, God cannot justly withhold the blessings of salvation in the instances here intended; this would be the same as saying, that justice requires God to save all. But the Scriptures represent it not only as an unmerited favor, that God saves any, but as a matter of fact, that he will not save all. Is God then chargeable with actual injustice? But if God is just in annexing such a penalty to his law, and just in executing it; it must be obvious that he is equally just in his *determination* to do so. For no principle of common sense can be more plain and certain, than that it is just for the omniscient God to determine beforehand to do that, which it is just for him actually to do. No imputation of injustice, therefore, can lie against the previous purpose of God respecting those who are not saved, which does not lie equally against his law, and his administration.

Here we find one of the principal sources of difficulty respecting this subject. It is not well considered, that the divine purpose is grounded on the same reasons, and conformed to the same views, with the divine conduct. When God punishes transgressors, he does it for sufficient reasons. When he previously determines to punish them, it is for the same reasons. When the Judge shall say to the wicked, "depart from me, ye that work iniquity;" the reason of the sentence is obvious, namely, that they had worked iniquity. With a perfect foreknowledge of that fact, and altogether on that account, he determines beforehand to pronounce that sentence against them. Thus the purpose of God perfectly corresponds with the acts of his government. Accordingly, his purpose to punish is no more absolute and unconditional, than his act in punishing. And the act of God in punishing those, who transgress his law, is no more absolute and unconditional, than the act of a magistrate in punishing transgressors of civil law. A good ruler punishes only for offences against the law; punishes only according to law; or, which is the same thing, according to the ill desert of offenders. And no good ruler can ever design or decree punishment on any other principles. I object as strongly, as any opposer of the doctrine of the divine purpose, against representing God as intending or appointing the destruction of sinners absolutely and unconditionally, without regard to justice, and goodness, and from a delight in seeing the misery of his creatures. Such a representation is infinitely distant from the truth. And whatever unguarded expressions Othodox writers may have sometimes used; I am persuaded they have really meant nothing contrary to the sentiments, which I have exhibited.

From the free remarks which I have made on this

subject, you will see what my views and those of my Orthodox brethren are, respecting what is called the divine purpose or *decree of reprobation*. It is, as we understand the subject, the determination of God, the righteous Governor of the world, to punish disobedient subjects *for their sins*, and according to their deserts. In one respect, therefore, there is an obvious difference between the purpose of God to *save*, and his purpose to *destroy*; a difference exactly agreeing with that which exists between the act of God in saving, and his act in destroying. He saves men as an act of grace, not out of respect to any thing in them, which renders them *deserving* of salvation. But he punishes the wicked purely out of respect to their sins, which render them *deserving* of punishment. He executes upon them simply an act of justice. That is, in a word; they, who are saved, receive a good which they do not deserve; but they who are destroyed, receive just that evil which they deserve. Accordingly, the *purpose* of God, in the former case, is a purpose to bestow upon men blessings, not deserved; but, in the latter case, it is a purpose to inflict upon men the very evil, as to kind and degree, which they deserve.

It has often been alleged, as an objection against the doctrine of Election, that it makes God *a respecter of persons*; or represents him, as influenced by *partiality*.

In order to determine, whether this objection is well founded, we must inquire what *respect of persons* is. The word, I think, has the same sense in Scripture, and in common discourse. Let us then see what its signification is.—Levit. xix. 15; “Thou shalt do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not *respect the person* of the poor, nor know the *person* of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor;” that is



thou shalt not be influenced in judgment by any consideration of the poverty or riches, the weakness or power of those, who are to be judged, but by a single regard to justice and truth. In 2 Chron. xix. 5—7, Jehoshaphat inculcated strict justice and fidelity upon Judges from the consideration, that with God, whose servants they were, there was no iniquity, *nor respect of persons*, nor taking of gifts; that is, that he was never biassed in judgment by any corrupt passions, personal attachments, or bribes, but acted purely out of regard to justice. See also Deut. x. 17, 18, where the people were cautioned, by similar language, against supposing that God would feel any partial respect to the persons of men, or that he would not exercise a just and equal regard to the fatherless, the widow, and the stranger. Acts x. 34. Peter learnt from his vision at Joppa, and from subsequent events, that God was not a *respector of persons*; that, in dispensing his blessings, he had not that partial and exclusive regard to the Jews, which had been attributed to him, but that, in every nation, he that feared God, and worked righteousness, was accepted. It referred to the special favor shown to Cornelius, a sincere worshipper of God among the Gentiles. So Rom. ii. 11, the same declaration is made, to show that, in his final judgment, God would treat all men on the same principle of impartial justice, without the least regard to any national distinction. See also James ii. 1—4; where *respect of persons* is explained to be a partial regard to the rich and splendid, and contempt of the poor.

Now if *respect of persons* is really what I have represented it to be; the doctrine of Election, which we hold, does not imply, that God is chargeable with it in any degree. It implies the contrary. For the doctrine

asserts, that he is not influenced to make choice of those who are to be saved, by any respect to their persons, more than to the persons of others, nor by a regard to any thing in them, or in their circumstances, which renders them more pleasing to him, or more worthy of his favor, than others. We believe, that those, who are chosen of God to salvation, are not chosen because they were, in themselves, more worthy of this blessing, than others; that God looked upon their moral feelings and conduct with the same disapprobation, and had the same view of their ill desert, and that he chose them, as we may say, *for reasons of state*,—for general reasons in his government, which he has not revealed. He did it, as it is expressed by the inspired writers, “according to the counsel of his own will,”—“according to his good pleasure,”—or “because it seemed good in his sight.” These phrases plainly denote that the purpose and administration of God are, in this respect, different from what our wisdom would dictate, or our affection choose; that they cannot be accounted for by any principles known to us, but result from the infinite perfection of God, and are conformed to reasons, which he has concealed in his own mind. These are our views. Accordingly, when, from the deep veneration we feel for the unsearchable wisdom of God, and an honest regard to what we conceive to be the obvious sense of various passages in his word, we assert the doctrine of Election; we are at the greatest possible distance from imputing to him any thing like partiality, or respect of persons. We believe he acts, and determines to act, altogether from different and higher reasons. And we are satisfied, that those reasons are perfectly wise and benevolent, not because we distinctly know what they are, but because we believe in the moral perfection of

God, and in cases the most profoundly mysterious, are sure, that his designs and actions are right.

Will any one still assert, that, if God chooses men to salvation, as the doctrine of Election implies, it must necessarily be from partiality, or respect of persons? Then it behooves him to prove, that God cannot choose them from any other motive;—that it is impossible there should be any other reason for making the difference. Unless this is made to appear by strong and conclusive arguments; we may still believe, that God does thus choose men to salvation, and, at the same time, believe that he is no respecter of persons, but that in this case, as in all others, he is influenced by reasons, which are perfectly consentaneous to his own eternal wisdom and benevolence, and which, if known to us, would appear in the highest degree honorable to his character.

Another objection, often urged against the doctrine of Election, is, that it *destroys free agency, and makes men mere machines.*

I reply; that, so far as our honest convictions are concerned, this objection is groundless; because we entertain no views of the doctrine, which seem to us inconsistent, in the smallest degree, with the most perfect free agency.

But it may be said that, whether we are aware of it or not, the opinion, which we entertain respecting the divine purpose, is *really* inconsistent with free moral agency.

In reply to this, I have time only to state, in few words, the reflections, which have been most satisfactory to my own mind.

The purpose of God, determining the salvation of his people, needs not to be supposed inconsistent with their

moral agency, unless the purpose of God respecting the conduct or condition of men is so in every case. I make it then a *general inquiry*. Is it in all cases, repugnant to the notion of the free moral agency of men, that God should have any previous purpose or design respecting their actions? If any man, accustomed to thorough investigation, should assert this broad principle; I should be much inclined to ask for his reasons.—Are the acts of the understanding, the affection, or the will of man deprived of their own proper nature, because they are conformed to a divine purpose? Is any one thing, great or small, which goes to constitute moral agency, taken away or in any degree altered, by the simple fact, that it exists according to God's eternal plan? It would seem to me reasonable to suppose, that God's purpose, or will, if it has any influence, must make things what they are, instead of depriving them of their proper nature.—I first look at things, both in the natural and moral world, as they exist. I try to discover what they are. Then, as they are of necessity dependant on God, I conclude they must exist according to his purpose. I find myself a moral being; that is, I am conscious of those powers, and those actions, which give me the clearest notion of a moral agent, and which, to my perfect satisfaction, render me accountable to a moral law and government. I then conclude, as I am a creature of God, that I exist as I am, namely, a moral agent, according to his purpose. And if God's purpose, determining my existence as a moral agent, is consistent with my actually existing as such; why may not his purpose, determining the exercises of my moral agency, be consistent with the existence of such moral exercises? The following positions, which I think conformable to sound reason and philosophy, express my views in brief. God

first determines, *that man shall be a moral agent*, and that in all the circumstances of his existence, he shall *possess and exercise all his moral powers*. And then God determines, that, *in the perfect exercise of all his moral powers*, he shall act in a certain manner, and form a certain character. The determination of God, thus understood, instead of being *inconsistent* with free moral agency, does in fact *secure* moral agency. In regard to this subject, it aims at nothing, and tends to produce nothing, but the *uninterrupted exercise of all our moral powers*.

But I drop all reasoning of this sort, and appeal to facts. There are numerous instances mentioned in Scripture, in which God is expressly declared to have *predetermined* the actions of men; and yet they had as much moral freedom, and felt themselves as worthy of praise or blame in those actions, as in any other. The examples of this, which every where occur in the sacred volume, prove incontrovertibly, that the purpose of God is consistent with moral agency. For in those cases, in which we certainly know that a divine purpose has existed, because it has been expressly declared, there has been, in every respect, as much evidence of moral agency, as in any case whatever, and as much, as we can conceive possible. Not the least thing, which can belong to the powers of a moral agent, or to the manner of exercising them, has been taken away, or obstructed, by the divine purpose. Nay, I should rather say, that those very powers of a moral agent, and the proper manner of exercising them, have been the true result of that purpose.

Now admitting in the cases referred to, even if they were much fewer than they are, that the purpose of God has consisted with the unimpaired moral agen-

cy of man ; I find no difficulty in admitting, that it may in any other case. And if so, the objection we have been considering, that the doctrine of Election destroys moral agency, and makes men mere machines, loses all its force.

I shall notice one more objection against the doctrine of Election, namely, *that it is inconsistent with the sincerity of God in the declarations of his word.*

The answer to this objection, which appears to me the most satisfactory, consists in assigning to the doctrine its proper form and relations. When I undertake to explain the purpose of God respecting those who are to be saved, I consider it essential to say, that it is to be so understood, as not to contradict his truth and sincerity in any of the declarations of his word. If, in connexion with God's purpose respecting the salvation of his people, the Bible teaches, that he commands men universally to repent, and invites them to accept eternal life, and that he is perfectly ready to grant them the blessings of salvation, on the most reasonable and gracious terms ; our faith must receive the doctrine, as having this form, and standing in this relation. It is thus the doctrine is actually received by Orthodox ministers generally. While they believe the doctrine of Election, they do undoubtingly believe and expressly teach, the perfect sincerity of God in all his addresses to men, whether chosen to salvation, or not ; and they present the invitations, of God's word to sinners, without any reference to that distinction, and with as much earnestness, and as much belief of the divine sincerity, as if they had no conception of any divine purpose. And my apprehension is, that all this is perfectly just ; and that if we had a thorough acquaintance with the subject, we should see, that the pur-

pose of God, and his corresponding agency are of such a character, that they occasion no difficulty at all respecting his sincerity. These two points of divine truth are entirely distinct. They relate to the character of God, and to the state of man, in different ways. And when they are proved, each one by its own proper evidence, we receive them both, exactly as we receive different truths, made known to us in different ways, in any of the sciences. As to the fact of their *consistency*, it is sufficient to satisfy us, to find, that they are both supported by conclusive evidence, and that neither of them palpably contradicts the other. If any man asserts that there is an inconsistency between these two doctrines, he must prove it. And in proving it, he must remember, that it will be difficult to satisfy thinking men, unless he can make it appear, that the evidence which supports one or the other of them is defective, or that the main proposition, contained in one of them, is, in the same sense in which it is there affirmed, contradicted or denied in the other.

In closing my remarks on this part of the subject, I am willing to concede, that *those views* of the doctrine of Election, against which Whitby, and many other respectable writers direct their principal arguments, are justly liable to objection. And if, in stating the doctrine, we should copy the example of some of its advocates, and call the purpose of God *an absolute, irresistible unconditional, unfrustrable decree*, using these epithets abundantly, and without qualification, and in such a manner, as would imply, that the divine purpose is unreasonable, or oppressive, or the divine agency in executing it, compulsory ; we should really give the doctrine such a character, that it could never be received by men of rational and candid minds. This is the apology, which I have

been accustomed to make for some Christians who exhibit marks of sincere piety to God, and heartfelt reverence for his word, who yet hesitate to admit, in so many words, the doctrine of Election. What they disbelieve is not the simple doctrine, as we understand it, but something which has been artfully, or injudiciously appended to it. Cases of this kind have led me to reflect on the importance of special caution, as to the manner of explaining and defending this profound and holy doctrine.

I have now done, as concisely as possible, what I thought necessary to explain the proper form and relations of this doctrine, and to guard it against misapprehension. I make these explanations a part of the statement of the doctrine. And it must, I think, occur to my readers, that, when I use such care to shape and limit the doctrine, and to guard it against misapprehension, I do but imitate what the Apostle Paul did in other cases. His opposers were inclined to put a wrong construction upon his doctrines, and to make wrong inferences from them. "If our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? God forbid."—Again, he taught, in respect of penitent sinners, that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." He then reasons with objectors. "What shall we say then? shall we sin, that grace may abound? God forbid." We make use of the same caution on the present subject. The Scriptures teach that God has given to Christ a portion of the human race; that all, who have been thus given to him, shall come to him, and be saved, without any exception; and that they are saved according to God's eternal purpose. This is what we mean by the doctrine of Election. But is this purpose of God *absolute* and *arbitrary*, in the sense in which these terms are



commonly applied to man? God forbid.—Is this purpose of God, in all respects, *unconditional*? By no means. For without the shedding of blood there can be no remission; nor can any be received into Christ's kingdom without repentance and faith.—But if God determines to save only a part of mankind, is he not *unjust*? God forbid. There is certainly no injustice to those who are saved; nor can there be any to those, who are not saved, if their sufferings are only what they deserve. But is not the purpose of God in this respect chargeable with partiality, or respect of persons? We say, God forbid. He makes the difference on principles, or for reasons perfectly agreeable to infinite wisdom and goodness.—But does not God's purpose to save his people, or his agency in executing that purpose, destroy their free agency, and make them machines? By no means. They are as free in this case as in any other; as free as they could be, were there no divine purpose. Finally; is not this immutable purpose of God inconsistent with the truth and sincerity of his proposals of mercy to sinners? We say here also, God forbid. His purpose no more interferes with his sincerity, than it does with any other divine attribute, or with any other truth. In his offer of salvation, he treats men as moral agents; and he always has bestowed salvation upon those, who have accepted his offer in the manner proposed; and he would have bestowed it upon those who perish, if they had in the same manner, complied with the conditions. Who then can impeach his sincerity?

You now see what we mean by the doctrine of Election, and in what manner we believe it. As the result of his own unsearchable wisdom and grace, and for reasons which relate to the great ends of his admin-

istration, God eternally purposed to save a great number of our race, and purposed to save them precisely in the manner, in which he does actually save them. Now every man, who duly weighs the subject, must perceive, that, according to this statement, the notion of a *previous* divine purpose is attended with no peculiar difficulty. If the divine purpose exactly corresponds with the divine conduct, our whole inquiry may properly relate to that conduct. For if the divine conduct in saving men is unobjectionable; the divine purpose, of which that conduct is the accomplishment, must be equally unobjectionable. Whatever it is proper for God to do, it is proper for him to determine to do. And whether that determination precede the action by a longer or shorter space, its character is the same.

After coming to this article of divine truth, concerning which so many mistakes have been entertained, and against which so many objections have been arrayed, I felt a desire to disclose to my readers, with the utmost frankness, my inmost thoughts upon the subject; being fully persuaded, that the doctrine, properly stated, is honorable to God; that it is abundantly confirmed by the scriptures, and has strong claims upon our faith. Indeed we should find it difficult to see, how any objection could ever be urged against it, were it not for the natural repugnance, which according to the word of God, exists in the heart of man, against the doctrines of divine truth, and which, to our great discomfort, and with a full conviction of its unreasonableness and criminality, we have felt in ourselves.—Were it not for this repugnance, which plainly shows the moral disorder of the human mind, no man, we think, could be found, who would not regard the doctrine with the most cordial acquiescence. For, my respected readers, the precious blessings of salvation

must be ultimately, either in the hands of God, or of man. The extent, to which they shall be received, must be determined by God, or by man. The Scriptures teach, and facts teach, that God has reserved this great concern in his own hands; that he "saves men according to his own purpose and grace;" or which is the same thing, that he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy." I make the appeal to your impartial judgment, whether this momentous concern could be in better hands; whether we have not reason for unbounded confidence in the purpose and administration of a Being, who is infinitely wise and good; and whether any sentiment respecting this whole subject can be more reasonable in itself, or more suitable for us, than that, which was uttered with so much joy by the blessed Jesus, respecting this very doctrine; *Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight.*

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## LETTER IX.

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS,

If there is any one doctrine of revelation, which the Orthodox distinguish, in point of importance, from all others, it is the doctrine of the *Atonement*. My design in this Letter is, not to write a treatise on this subject, but to expose certain erroneous methods of reasoning respecting it, to clear away some of the objections and difficulties, which have been supposed to attend it, and so to prepare the way for a fair consideration of its truth and importance. This is all which the nature of my undertaking requires.

Here, as in other cases, a regard to truth obliges me

to say, that Unitarians have greatly misrepresented our opinions. The Author of the Sermon before us gives it as a part of the Orthodox system, that "God took upon him human nature, that he might pay to his own justice the debt of punishment incurred by men, and might enable himself to exercise mercy." He undertakes in another place to express our opinion in still stronger terms ; "that God took human nature, that he might appease his own anger towards men, or make an infinite satisfaction to his own justice;" and after giving our opinion this shape, he asks very earnestly, for one text where it is taught. We reply, that an opinion, *thus shaped and colored*, is taught nowhere in the Bible, and believed by no respectable Trinitarians. It is an essential part of our faith, that there is a real distinction between the Father and the Son, and that the distinction is of such a nature, that they are two, and are in Scripture represented to be two, as *really*, as Moses and Aaron, though not in the same sense, nor in any sense inconsistent with their being one. In consequence of this distinction, we consider it perfectly proper to say, that the Father sends the Son to die for sinners, and accepts the sacrifice he makes ; that the Son obeys the Father, seeks his glory, &c. We find that the Scripture does thus represent them ; and though in our view they both possess the same divine perfection, we believe that, in consequence of the distinction between them, this representation of Scripture is just. We pretend not, with minds so limited as ours, to be able to know the intrinsic nature, or the ground of this distinction ; but its *results* we know, because the Bible reveals them ; and we believe the distinction to be correspondent with what is thus revealed. So that it is something quite diverse from the form of sound words, which we adopt, and quite diverse

from our belief, to say, that "God sent himself,"—"that God took human nature, that he might appease his own anger, and enable himself to exercise mercy." And if any writer should still say that, if the Son shares divine perfection with the Father, it is impossible there should be any such distinction, as the Scripture makes between them; he would indeed repeat that which has been said by a succession of writers from the *Fratres Poloni* down to the present day, but which, so far as I know, has had little better proof, than strong affirmation.

But it is not to my purpose to go into any argument in proof of the personal distinction in the Godhead; but merely to say, that the passages, above quoted from the Sermon, and a multitude of other passages, which might be quoted from Unitarian writers, are far from being a true and impartial representation of our faith. They are indeed calculated to slur the Orthodox doctrine of the Atonement. But with every sober, honest man, the question will be, *are they just?*—It is as plain to us, as to this writer, that God, as God, cannot be a sufferer, or bear a penalty. And hence we infer the necessity of the incarnation. "The Word," the divine Redeemer, "was made flesh," and thus was put into a capacity to suffer and die.

The Author of this Sermon, and other Unitarian writers seem to think, that the idea, which is conveyed to common minds by the Orthodox system, is "that Christ's death has an influence in making God placable or merciful, in quenching his wrath, and awakening his kindness towards men." This representation demands particular attention.

I observe, then, that it is uniformly the sentiment of the Orthodox, that *the origin, the grand moving cause of*

*the whole work of redemption, was the infinite love, benignity, or mercy of God ;* and that it is purely in consequence of this love, that he appointed a Mediator, and adopted every measure, which he saw to be necessary for the salvation of man. The goodness, mercy, or placability of God, considered as an attribute of his character, could then be neither produced nor increased by the atonement of Christ ; as the atonement itself owed its existence wholly to that eternal, immutable goodness. This view of the subject, which we derive from John iii. 16, and many other texts of similar import, we inculcate with more than ordinary frequency and earnestness. We believe that it is essential to the honor of the divine character, and to the sincerity and comfort of christian devotion. If we have ever made use of language, or indulged opinions, in the smallest degree unfavorable to this sentiment, we deplore the error we have committed. And whenever we find a fellow creature, who has entertained a different sentiment, we will vie with the Author of this Sermon, in our efforts to correct a mistake, which we regard with so much horror.

But how happens it, that Unitarians have so often, and so materially misapprehended our opinions on this momentous subject ? The only occasion we have given for their misapprehension has been, the use of *strong metaphorical language*. It has been common for Orthodox writers and preachers, especially when they have aimed to move the affections of men, or to impress the truth upon them deeply, to represent Christ, as rescuing sinners from the vengeance of God, or shielding them from the arrows of his vengeance ; as appeasing, or turning away his anger, staying his fury, quenching his wrath or vengeance, divesting his throne of its ter-

rors, satisfying his justice, delivering men from the demands of his dreadful law, &c.

Now I pretend not that this language is exactly like the language of the Scriptures. But the resemblance is so great, that no objection can possibly lie against the one, which does not lie equally against the other. To make this perfectly clear, I shall give a few examples of the manner, in which both the Old Testament and the New frequently speak of God. Psalm xc. 7. "We are consumed by thine anger." Isa. v. 25. "His anger is not turned away;"—xxx. 30. "The Lord shall show the indignation of his anger;"—xl. 25. "He poured on him the fury of his anger;"—lxvi. 15. "The Lord will come to render his anger with fury." Hosea xi. 9. "I will execute the fierceness of mine anger." Deut. xxix. 30. "The anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man." In other places the anger of the Lord is said to be kindled. It is said, that he is angry with the wicked every day; that he hath whet his sword; that he hath bent his bow, and made it ready; that he revengeth and is furious; and that he will meet his enemies, as a bear bereaved of her whelps. The writers of the New Testament sometimes use similar phraseology. They speak of the indignation and wrath of God, and represent vengeance as his prerogative.—The Scriptures also represent God as turning or being turned from his anger, from the fierceness of his anger, and from his hot displeasure. This was the familiar language of history and devotion under the former dispensation. And we well know that the God, whom Moses, David, and the prophets worshipped, was the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It will be said, that the language above cited is *metaphorical*. Undoubtedly it is. And so is the language,

which is used by Orthodox writers on the subject of the atonement. The Scripture metaphors, which I have brought into view, are drawn from the same sources, and are of the same nature with those, which are objected to in the writings of the Orthodox. And I am sure that no advocate for Orthodoxy, how great soever the warmth of his natural temperament, and how glowing soever his imagination and his style, has ever, even in poetry, used bolder metaphors respecting God, than are found in the sacred writers. Where shall we find imagery more terrific, than in those passages of Scripture, in which God is represented as full of anger and vengeance, even the fierceness and heat of anger, so that his wrath smokes and burns against the wicked ;—in which his fury is represented to be like the fury of a bear bereaved of her whelps ;—in which too he is set forth, as a terrible executioner, or warrior, with his sharp sword, or with his bow and arrows, ready for the work of destruction? And what advocates for the Atonement have employed language more highly figurative, than we find in those passages, in which God is said to cause his anger to cease, or to be turned, by prayer, from the fierceness of his wrath? Even if we should familiarly speak of the Atonement in the language, which the Author of the sermon thinks so exceptionable, and should represent it as designed to “render God merciful, to quench his wrath, and awaken his kindness towards men ;” we might very safely rest our justification for the use of such metaphorical language, on the example of men, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Will it be said, that the bold metaphors, above-cited from the Scriptures, were peculiar to the idiom of the Eastern language, especially the language of the ancient Hebrews, and that they are inadmissible under the dis-



pensation of the Gospel? I grant that they belonged to the idiom of the Eastern nations, especially of the ancient Hebrew writers. But it must be remembered, that Christ, in the most unqualified terms, recommended the Scriptures of the Old Testament to his disciples; and also that the writers of the New Testament thought it proper to quote, without palliation or explanation, some of the metaphorical passages referred to, and sometimes, with similar metaphors, to enliven their own style. And surely it cannot be thought strange, that a Christian minister, who is accustomed to entertain so high a reverence for the Holy Scriptures, and to look to them, as containing every thing pure and excellent, both in matter and form, should infuse into his preaching or writing the same kind of metaphor, as that which abounds in them. It has generally been considered best by Unitarians, if I mistake not, as well as by others, to *keep as near, as may be, to the peculiar phraseology of the Scriptures*. Why, then, are we blamed for doing it here? It is not very easy to account for the manner in which Unitarian writers have treated this thing. If they acknowledge that the language of Scripture, above cited, is to be understood as *highly metaphorical*; why should they suppose that similar language in our sermons and books of divinity is meant to be understood *literally*? The moment they interpret our language, as they interpret the figurative language of the Bible, the difficulty vanishes.

But what is the *meaning* of the metaphorical language now under consideration? To satisfy ourselves on this subject, it is only necessary to consider the nature and design of metaphors, and the manner in which we learn their signification. In metaphorical language, words are taken out of their proper, literal sense, and for the sake of illustra-

tion or impression, are used to denote other things, which are conceived to have some resemblance to what is denoted by the literal sense. It is essential to a metaphor, that there should be, in some respect, a real or apparent resemblance between the *proper* sense of the word, and the *metaphorical*. How, then, are we to interpret the metaphorical language of Scripture, above cited? Does it imply that God himself is really like an angry, fierce, revengeful man, who is impelled by his outrageous passions to inflict pain, and commit acts of violence? Infinitely otherwise. What the Bible makes known respecting God, and all our best conceptions of his character forbid it. Every divine perfection forbids it. And common sense forbids it. Nor is it the least objection to the use of this species of metaphor, that the literal sense would be contrary to truth, and would violate the plainest principles of religion. This is the case with respect to some of those metaphors, which are considered most unexceptionable; as when God is called a rock, and when he is said to walk, or ride, or sit. In all such instances, common sense, properly enlightened respecting the nature of the subject, is competent at once to determine the import of the metaphorical language. If a metaphor is taken from an object familiarly known, and is used with any degree of judgment, or taste; we perceive instantly the point of similitude which is intended, and the meaning of the metaphor is perfectly obvious.

We say, then, that the texts above quoted, do not imply, that the *character* of God is in any degree like the character of a man, who is impelled by his angry, malignant passions, to acts of violence. They do not imply that any thing like the feeling of revenge in a man, can ever belong to the God of love. The analogy intended is between the *effects* of anger and revenge in

man, and the *effects* of what is called anger and revenge in God. But even here, careful restriction is still necessary. For the evils, which God inflicts upon sinners, spring from *motives* totally different from human anger and revenge. Nor do the effects of the divine displeasure resemble the effects of human anger, as to the *manner* in which they take place. But as to the *certainty* and *dreadfulness* of the effects, there is an obvious resemblance. In order to set forth how fearful and how inevitable is the punishment of the wicked, it is the custom of the inspired writers to resort to the most terrific objects in nature. To illustrate the dreadfulness of the displeasure of God against sinners, they point us to a man, whose anger is fierce, and consumes all before it; and, to make the illustration still more impressive, they point us to a raging bear bereaved of her whelps. So terrible are the effects of the divine displeasure.

If we have taken a correct view of the metaphors above cited, we are prepared to understand the representations of Scripture on the other part of the subject. When God is spoken of as turning or being turned from the fierceness of his anger, or causing his anger to cease; the sense must obviously be, that the dreadful *effects* of his righteous displeasure are prevented, or removed. A man whose anger abates, and whose mind becomes tranquil, ceases to inflict evil. It is with a view to this, that, when the effects of God's holy displeasure are prevented, or removed, he is said to turn or be turned from his anger; and, if those effects were very dreadful, from the fierceness of his anger. And on the same ground, if any being in heaven or earth, should do any thing, which, according to the principles of the divine government, would have an influence to prevent or remove the evils, that would otherwise result

from the displeasure of God ; that being might be said to turn God from his anger, or render him merciful ; and if the evils, thus prevented or removed, were great and dreadful, he might, by a still bolder figure, be said to "quench the wrath of God, and awaken his kindness towards men."

Now as this kind of metaphor is so abundantly used in the Scripture, why may it not be used by those, who make the Scripture their pattern and guide ? And when, in conformity to their perfect pattern, they do use it, why should they not be understood, as using it in the same manner with those inspired writers, from whom they borrow it ? Why should not the same principles of common sense, and candor, and good taste be applied to the interpretation of it in the one case, as in the other ? If this were done, no objection could remain in the minds of Unitarians, certainly not in the mind of the Author of this Sermon, against the language of Orthodox writers, respecting the influence of the Atonement. For he says, that many Unitarians, clearly meaning to include himself, "think that the Scriptures ascribe the remission of sins to Christ's death, with an emphasis so peculiar, that we ought to consider this event as having a special influence in removing punishment, as a condition or method of pardon, without which, repentance would not avail us, at least to that extent which is now promised by the gospel." I am glad to find this development of scriptural views ; although there is a sinking phrase at the close of the sentence, which the Apostle Paul would never have written. It is then admitted as a fact, and certainly it must be regarded as a fact of vast moment, "that the death of Christ has a special influence in removing punishment;" that it is an indispensable condition of pardon, and the only consistent method, in which salvation can

be granted. This important fact is described by Orthodox writers in various ways. It is the representation of some, particularly of those, whose ardent temperament, or vivid fancy, makes them fond of glowing imagery, that the death of Christ quenched his Father's wrath, caused him to lay aside his thunder, and to look upon sinners with a smiling face; that it turned a throne of fiery vengeance into a throne of mercy, &c. In such metaphorical language as this, the just punishment of sin is likened to the effect of human wrath, of thunder, and of irresistible power in a king, who rises, in frowning majesty, to inflict condign punishment upon rebels; and the language teaches, that the punishment of sin, illustrated by such images, is prevented or removed by the mediation of Christ. The language, taken literally, would impute a character to God, which would excite universal horror. But if understood according to the legitimate principles of interpreting metaphors, it teaches the simple, but allimportant truth, that the death of Christ was the means of procuring pardon, or the medium, through which salvation is granted.

Another representation which is frequently made, and which is borrowed from Scripture, is, that Christ *bought* us, or *redeemed* us from destruction by the price of his own blood. This figure is drawn from the practice of redeeming captives from bondage, by paying a price. The similitude, when exactly expressed, is this; as captives or slaves are released from bondage and restored to liberty, by the payment of a satisfactory price; so sinners are delivered from just punishment, and made heirs of heaven, by the atonement of Christ. Sometimes this same thing is spoken of by Orthodox writers, as the payment of a debt. This figure is also derived from Scripture, which represents us, as God's debtors.

Matt. vi. 12. "Forgive us our debts." Spiritual concerns are familiarly represented in the parables of Christ, by what takes place between debtors and creditors. As sinners we deserve punishment; that is, we owe it to the righteous Governor of the world, to suffer evil in proportion to our sins. When Christ is said to pay our debt, it is signified simply, that by means of his sufferings, he delivers us from punishment. This similitude does not relate particularly to the mode of deliverance, nor to the nature of the evil which is escaped, nor to the nature of the good secured; but merely to the fact of his procuring deliverance by means of his death. As the debtor, who has nothing to pay, and is confined to prison, is freed from imprisonment by the generosity of a friend, who steps forward in his name, and pays his debt; so sinners are freed from punishment by the kindness of the Savior, who interposed and shed his blood for them.

It is said, that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, by being made a curse for us. The law denounced a punishment. This was its curse. Christ delivers us from that punishment, by being made a curse; that is, by suffering an evil, which, so far as the ends of the divine government are concerned, was equivalent to the execution of the curse of the law upon transgressors.

When Christ is said to have *satisfied divine justice*, or the demands of justice, the sense is the same. In civil governments, if justice is satisfied; in other words, if that is done which perfectly answers the ends of justice; there is no further necessity of punishment. So, when Christ has done and suffered that which answers the ends of justice in the divine government, the necessity of punishment, so far as those ends are concerned, is superseded. And if any of us should say, that *our sin was imputed* to Christ, our meaning must be, that Christ suf-

fered on account of our sin,—suffered, in some sense, as he would have suffered, if our sin had been imputed to him; though a real imputation of our sin to Christ, in a *literal* sense, would have been a palpable inconsistency in a government founded in justice and truth.

I might mention other forms of figurative language, which have been employed by respectable divines, to set forth the design and influence of Christ's death; and might say respecting them all, that if they were interpreted according to the same principles, which govern us in the interpretation of the metaphorical language of Scripture, a very satisfactory sense might be given to them, so that no difficulty would remain. I would therefore appeal to all those, who have duly considered the nature and just interpretation of metaphors, whether it is a mark of judgment, or good taste, to overlook the metaphorical sense of the phraseology now under consideration, and to persist in treating it, as though it could have no other than a literal sense. Against the literal sense, there are indeed many objections. And there are as many against the literal sense of the texts of Scripture, above recited. But against that metaphorical sense, which I have suggested, there are no objections in either case.

But respecting these metaphors, I have two additional remarks. The first is, that some men, who profess to hold the general principles of Orthodoxy, have evidently been led into error by mixing a degree of the literal sense with the metaphorical. Though they seem to interpret the phrases referred to, as figurative; it is soon made apparent by their reasoning, that they still retain some impression of the literal sense. To this I think we can trace the notion, that, if Christ has made a perfect atonement, and satisfied divine justice, those, for whom he has done this, are no longer under the same obligation

to obey the law, and punishing them for their sins would no longer be just. This would indeed follow from understanding some of the representations of Scripture, and of Orthodox writers, in a literal sense. For if Christ paid our debt, or the price of our redemption *literally*, i. e. just as a friend discharges the obligation of an insolvent debtor, or purchases the freedom of a slave by the payment of money; it would certainly be an unrighteous thing for us to be held to pay our own debt, or to suffer the evils of servitude.

To the same cause I am disposed to ascribe it, that so many men have thought the doctrine of the atonement, or of salvation through the blood of Christ, unfavorable to the cause of morality. If the atonement be literally and exactly like the payment of what is due from an insolvent debtor; if it have such an effect, as to release the sinner from his obligation to render obedience to the law,—such an effect as to take away or diminish his ill-desert, or to make it less just in God to punish; the doctrine would indeed be unfavorable to morality. But we deny that the atonement has any such analogy, as is here implied, to pecuniary transactions; and we deny that the metaphorical language, which is taken from those transactions to illustrate the subject, indicates any such analogy. The atonement, as a means, and we believe the only consistent means, does indeed deliver sinners from punishment. But its influence is such, and operates in such a way, that the righteous authority of the law is confirmed, and that the undiminished obligations of sinners to obedience, their ill-desert, and the justice of their punishment are all set in the clearest light.

Another hurtful notion, which seems to spring from the same source, that is, from attaching something of a literal sense to figurative language, is, that



God's requiring perfect satisfaction to his justice in order to the forgiveness of sin, or his determination not to save sinners, unless their debt is fully discharged by another, shows less benevolence, than if he should forgive and save by his own unpurchased goodness, without any satisfaction rendered by another. This notion often lurks in the minds of those who believe the doctrine of atonement, but whose faith is mixed with obscurity of knowledge, and easily perplexed with difficulties. By those who reject the doctrine of atonement, the same thing is urged, as an objection against it. They contend, that the doctrine represents God to be mercenary, selfish, inexorable ; and so makes his character much less amiable, than if he should forgive his disobedient but penitent children, by free mercy, without requiring any satisfaction from another. "How plain is it, according to this doctrine," says the Author of the Sermon before us, "that God, instead of being plenteous in forgiveness, never forgives ; for it is absurd to speak of men as forgiven, when their whole punishment is borne by a substitute." Unitarians have often made the same allegation against our doctrine. Now this would be a real difficulty, and might be urged conclusively against the doctrine, if the language, employed in describing the atonement, were to be taken literally. For surely a rich creditor, who imprisons a poor insolvent debtor, and refuses to release him, till every farthing is paid by him or by his surety, shows much less kindness and generosity, than if he should give up the debt and release the poor debtor *freely*. And a father, who deals out to an offending child the full measure of justice, and withholds every token of paternal kindness, till he receives the most perfect satisfaction, exhibits a much less amiable character, than if, from the ardent love of his heart, he should

be inclined to hail the first opportunity of showing favor to his child ; to meet him, while yet a great way off, and, on seeing marks of penitence, to embrace him, to cover his faults, and load him with kindness. But here the analogy fails. For God's refusing to forgive without satisfaction, is an exercise of his infinite goodness, as the guardian of his kingdom. His requiring full satisfaction to his justice, or a full atonement for sin, and his appointing that such an atonement should be made, resulted wholly from benevolence. " God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." It shows higher love for God to save in this way, than if he should save without an atonement, by an act of unpurchased mercy ; which is only saying, that it shows greater benevolence in God, as moral governor, to save sinners in a way, which will vindicate the honors of his violated law, and secure from injury the interests of his kingdom, than in a way, which would expose his law to contempt, and the interests of his kingdom to injury. And this view of the subject, I think, must be obvious to every enlightened christian, who is disentangled from the literal sense of metaphorical language, and who attends to the whole account, which the Bible gives, of the love which God has exercised, and the measures he has pursued, in the salvation of men.

It would lead me beyond my intention, to point out all those errors, which may be traced to the habit of giving something of a literal sense to the metaphorical language of the Holy Scriptures, and of other writings, on the subject of the atonement. Having suggested instances of this, sufficient to excite proper attention to the subject, I shall proceed to my second remark ; namely ; *when there is an evident tendency in the minds of men to understand any part of the metaphorical language, which*

*has commonly been used respecting the atonement, in a literal sense, and when we perceive that this occasions hurtful misapprehensions ; it is the dictate of christian wisdom, to be sparing in the use of such language, and, when used, to guard it with some special care against its liability to be understood literally.* This caution I think should be applied to the language, which illustrates the atonement by pecuniary transactions, as the payment of a debt, which a poor man owes ; cancelling his obligations ; or purchasing his release from imprisonment. Nor should I think it the part of wisdom, at this day, and on this subject, to make a very copious use even of those Scripture metaphors, which represent God as having the passion of anger, or wrath, and the atonement as the means of quenching it, or turning him from it. An abundance of this species of metaphor is not expedient, because it is not so consentaneous to the genius of our language, as to that of the Hebrew ; and especially, because the endless controversies, and extravagant fancies, which have prevailed in the world, have perplexed the minds of men, and exposed them to erroneous impressions on this subject. The object of language is to communicate useful truths to others. If it comes to be the case with any particular words or phrases, that they do not in fact communicate such truths, though the words or phrases may be proper in themselves, and even though they may be authorised by Scripture ; it becomes expedient to explain them clearly, or to adopt new ones.

Socinian writers seem to suppose, that we overlook those numerous texts, which, without any reference to the death of Christ, declare the free mercy of God towards penitent sinners. Here I think it easy, by a few connected remarks, to remove all misapprehension, and to present the subject in a light which cannot fail to be satisfactory.

The doctrine now before us, divides itself into two parts ; first, the *simple fact*, that *God is merciful*, and *will forgive* penitent sinners ; second, the particular *way* or *method* of forgiveness. These two things are perfectly distinct in their nature, and may, if God pleases, be subjects of distinct revelations. He may, if he sees it to be best, reveal to mankind, at one period of time, or in one part of his word, the *simple fact* of his mercy, or his readiness to forgive the penitent, without giving at that time, or in that part of Scripture, the least intimation of any medium, through which his mercy flows. And it is clear, that the knowledge of this *simple fact*, without any other information, would be of vast importance. Now this *simple fact*, so important to guilty men, is made known in a great multitude of texts, both in the Old Testament and the New, where nothing is said of the *method*, in which mercy is exercised. If this had been the case universally, and God had nowhere revealed any thing, but simply that he would forgive the penitent ; our faith must have been confined to that simple truth. As to the *way*, or *method*, in which the divine forgiveness would be exercised, we should know nothing, except that it must be a way consistent with the perfections of God, and the safety of his moral government. I grant, that our faith, even if thus limited, might be a powerful principle of action, and an inexhaustible source of comfort. And in such a case, it would certainly be our duty to check the impatience of a prying curiosity, and to wait quietly, till God should see fit to give more light. But he has given more light. He has taught us, by a revelation, additional to what I have just supposed, that his mercy, which is so often declared in the Scriptures, is exercised towards penitent sinners, *through the word of Christ* ; that forgiveness comes in this way, and

in no other. Thus our faith is extended, just in proportion to the greater extent of the revelation.

With regard to this last point, it is the opinion of some writers, who admit the doctrine of the Atonement; that nothing is revealed, but the single truth, that forgiveness comes through the mediation of Christ; and that we are wholly incapable of knowing what particular bearing the death of Christ has upon the moral government of God, or *how* it secures mercy to penitent sinners. But careful attention to a few texts of Scripture must, I think, lead to a different conclusion. I shall name only two. Gal. iii. 13. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." The text, and what immediately precedes it, clearly teach, that men, as transgressors, are under the curse of the law, which they have transgressed; that Christ delivered them from that curse, that is, from the evil, which the law denounced against them for sin; and that he did it, *by being made a curse for them*. A literal and exact substitution was impossible. But the Apostle's language must signify, that the curse, which Christ was made, or the evil he endured, had respect to the same law, from whose curse sinners were redeemed. It had respect to the same law; not that it was literally and exactly the penalty of the law, or the punishment which the law threatened against sinners; but it had such a relation to the law, and such an influence upon it, that sinners, on account of it, might be consistently released from its curse; whereas, had not Christ been made a curse for them, that is, suffered and died for them, they themselves must have endured the curse. Thus, although the curse of the law, falling on Christ, is, in various respects, different from what it would be, if it should fall upon sinners; yet, in relation to the ends of the law, or

of the divine administration, it is substantially the same. And as those benevolent ends are secured, by the curse falling upon Christ; it becomes consistent with the order of God's kingdom, for penitent sinners to be delivered from the curse.

The other passage I shall quote is Rom. iii. 24, 25, 26. "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Here the immediate object of Christ's being set forth is represented to be, to declare, or make known the righteousness of God. Notwithstanding the authority of Schleusner and Rosenmuller, I am clearly of opinion, with most Commentators and Divines, that *δικαιοσύνη*, in this place, has its primary and common sense, and signifies that attribute of God, which leads him, as moral Governor of the world, to render to every man according to his deeds, and of course to inflict the curse of the law on sinners. The object of the death of Christ is then, to declare, or manifest, that God is righteous, and that in the salvation of sinners he will support the honors of his law, and "the interests of virtue."

In contemplating this subject, I ask myself, what hinderance there is in the way of God's showing the same favor to transgressors, as to the obedient. The answer is obvious. His law, and his character, as Lawgiver, forbid it, and the interests of his moral kingdom forbid it. If, in the common course of his administration, he should show the same favor to transgressors, as to the obedient, he would set aside the authority of his law, and leave no

visible distinction between virtue and vice. Any ruler, who should proceed in this way, would soon bring to an end the order and happiness of his subjects. The expedient, which the wisdom of God has adopted, prevents this consequence of extending favor to transgressors. The cross of Christ makes known the righteousness or justice of God, as moral Governor. It shows that he does make, and will forever make a distinction between holiness and sin. It has such an influence upon his moral administration, that he can be just, and the justifier of him that believeth; that is, can forgive sin without degrading the majesty, or surrendering the claims of justice. To express the same in other words; the influence of the atonement is such, that it has become consistent with justice to do, what would otherwise have been totally inconsistent. It is in this way I come to a similar conclusion with the author of the Sermon; namely; that Christ's death, "has an inseparable connexion with forgiveness, that it has a special influence in removing punishment, as a condition or method of pardon, without which repentance would not avail us."

Correspondent with this is the practical view which devout Christians generally take of this subject. When they behold Jesus, who was holy, harmless, and undefiled, suffering and dying for sinners, they see the honors of God's righteousness vindicated, and the principles of his moral government established. They consider what ends are accomplished in the divine administration by the just punishment of transgressors. All these ends they see accomplished, in the highest degree, by the death of Christ. And thus it becomes clear, that God can forbear to punish penitent transgressors, on account of Christ's death, without any injury to his moral government, or any sacrifice of the interests of virtue.

Against our scheme, Unitarians urge one particular objection, which may deserve a few moments' special notice. The objection in short is, that the Trinitarian scheme lowers down the value of Christ's sacrifice, and "robs his death of interest." The alleged ground of this objection is, that we believe Christ to be God and man, united in one person, and that, as divinity could not be the subject of pain, the *sufferer* must have been merely a man.

This objection entirely overlooks an important article in our system. We believe, that all the divine and human perfections, which the Scriptures ascribe to Christ, constitute but *one person*; and consequently that all his actions and sufferings belong to him, *as one person*; much as all the actions and sufferings of any man, whether mental or corporeal, belong to him, *as one man*. It results from this view of the subject, that the value or significancy of any action or suffering in Christ must be according to the dignity or excellence of his whole character. Whether the action or suffering takes place particularly in one part or another of his complex person, it is attributable to his whole person; and it derives its peculiar character from the character of his whole person, constituted as it is. The suffering of Christ ~~is~~ therefore of as high importance or value, in making an atonement, as if it could have been, and in reality had been, in the most proper sense, the suffering of the Divinity. So that whatever may be the conceptions of Arians or Socinians, as *we* view the subject, the fact that Christ endured suffering in his human nature, and not directly in his divine, occasions no difficulty as to the preciousness, which we ascribe to his atonement. And I think the views of the Orthodox in this case are capable of being defended in the most satisfactory manner.



The rejection of the doctrine of the Atonement, with which some, who call themselves Christians, are chargeable, is not to be regarded merely as a speculative error. It plainly indicates the disposition of the heart. For, after God has sent his Son to be a propitiation, and has told us, that we must rely upon his atoning blood, as the sole ground of forgiveness ; if we disregard that provision, and hope for heaven on the footing of our own virtue or good works, we give proof of a temper of mind, which is in total contrariety to the humble spirit of christian faith. We signify that we think ourselves entitled to future happiness, on our own account, and that we have no need of the merit or intercession of another to recommend us to the favor of God. Some Socinians boldly use language like this. They have the audacity to bring forward a personal claim upon the favor of God. The same spirit appears in all, who rest their hopes of heaven on their own goodness. Although God has provided a perfect righteousness, as the foundation of their hope ; and has taught them, that the salvation of sinners depends wholly on Christ crucified, and that no works of righteousness, which they have done, and no accomplishments or dispositions, which they possess, must ever be named in his presence ; they still persist in spurning this provision of infinite mercy ; in counting as foolishness, the grand plea, with which a Savior's death has furnished them, and in obtruding their own virtue upon his notice, as a better reason for their acceptance, than all the worthiness and all the grace of Christ crucified.

Thus far I have thought it necessary to proceed in order to remove misapprehensions, and to give a just, though brief view of the real sentiments we entertain on this momentous subject. It has, I trust, been made evident that our scheme of faith is far from sullyng the

glory of God's moral perfections, or impugning the principles of either justice or benevolence. On the contrary, it has for its foundation the immutable perfection of God's moral character, and the inviolable principles of his righteous government. And it is, if we know our own hearts, the strong attachment we feel to his glorious character and government, and our earnest desire, that they may have the honor of a perfect and eternal vindication, which creates in us such an interest in the doctrine of the atonement.

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## LETTER IX.

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS,

THE design I wish to execute in these letters, requires me particularly to bring into view one more doctrine of the Orthodox, namely, the doctrine of *divine influence*. To those, who entertain the same views with us of the character of man, and the nature and necessity of holiness, this doctrine must appear of the highest worth. But here, as in former cases, instead of giving a regular treatise on the subject, it is my intention to correct mistakes, to expose the weakness of objections, to solve difficulties, and to do all I can to induce those, who have rejected, or half believed this doctrine, to inquire with a candid, unprejudiced mind, into its truth and importance.

It has been the general representation of Unitarians, that we believe there is an invincible, overpowering, irresistible influence of the divine spirit on the minds of men, which is totally repugnant to their moral agency

and accountability, and which makes them entirely passive,—mere machines.

In order that you may be under advantages to judge, whether this representation is just; I shall here offer you a brief statement of our doctrine, with the leading topics of argument, which we urge in its support, and the explanations we are accustomed to give it in relation to other obvious truths.

Our doctrine of divine influence results, as we conceive, from the nature and condition of created beings, who are and must be dependent on their Creator and Preserver. This necessary dependence of an intelligent creature, relates to the acts of the mind, as well as to outward circumstances. But we infer the doctrine more directly from the fact, that men are universally sinners; that their moral nature is the subject of a most woful disorder. We think it the dictate of sound experience, that men will not in fact cast off the dominion of their corrupt affections, and render to God the homage of a sincere obedience, without special divine aid.

But the argument, on which we rest without any wavering, is the testimony of the sure word of God. I need not give the proof in detail. They who attentively peruse the Scriptures, will not fail to perceive, that this doctrine is there taught with great clearness, and in a great variety of forms. If God, by his spirit, produces no good affections in our hearts; if he vouchsafes no spiritual illumination; if he does nothing to cleanse us from sin, and form us to holiness; what can be the import of those texts, which teach, that God works in his people both to will and to do; that he creates in them a new heart & a new spirit; that he opens their eyes, draws them, turns, renews, strengthens them, and helps their infirmities? And what can be the meaning of the lan-

guage, which christians universally use in prayer, when they ask God to subdue their sins, to purify their hearts, and to work in them all the good pleasure of his goodness; and when they ascribe to God all the good they possess? We understand the language of Scripture on this subject in its most obvious sense; and on this obvious sense we found our belief, that all virtue or holiness in man is to be ascribed to the influence of the divine spirit, and that without the effectual agency of the Spirit, man would have no holy affections, and perform no acts of holy obedience. This is a general statement of the orthodox doctrine.

But we do not stop here. The doctrine has relations to other subjects,—relations which are of great moment. We are sensible we cannot do justice to the doctrine, without attending to those relations, and giving the consideration of them a proper influence in regulating our conceptions of the doctrine.

This doctrine has a relation, first, to the attributes of God. In view of this relation, we say, the influence, which God exerts in or upon his creatures, is such as agrees with his infinite perfections,—such as results from them, and is suited to make a just exhibition of them. It is prompted by divine benevolence, as the influence is to accomplish a good end. It is regulated by divine wisdom, which renders it perfectly suited to accomplish that end. Secondly, the doctrine of divine influence has an immediate relation to the human mind. In view of this relation, we say, that the divine influence is adapted to the nature of the mind; that the Holy Spirit operates in such a manner, as to offer no violence to any of the principles of an intelligent and moral nature; that it always produces its effects in the understanding, according to the essential properties and laws, which belong to

the understanding, and in the will and affections, without interfering with any of the properties and laws, which belong to them. We consider this peculiar agency of the divine Spirit in producing and continuing holiness in men to be just as consistent with every thing, which belongs to an intelligent and moral nature, as the general agency of God in preserving and governing his rational creatures. Nor do we apprehend, that there is any thing more incompatible with the nature, and properties of the mind, in the influence, which *God* exerts upon it, than in the influence which *we* exert upon it. It is a matter of fact, that we have an influence, often a controlling influence, over the understanding and will of our fellow creatures. The influence which others have upon us, be it ever so great and effectual, may operate, as we certainly know, in a way perfectly correspondent with our moral nature. We are so constituted, that we may be influenced by others to do good, in consistency with our own freedom, and virtue, and praiseworthiness; that is, we are none the less voluntary in doing good, and none the less deserving of approbation, because we are induced to do it by the rational, moral influence, which others exert upon our minds. I pretend not that the two cases are exactly parallel. But it is natural to suppose, that the divine influence is, at least, as consistent with our free agency and accountableness, as any human influence can be. For surely God, who made us, can have access to our understanding and heart, and produce any effects there, which he pleases; and surely he must know how to do this, without infringing any of the principles of our intelligent or moral nature. This, in our view, cannot be denied, without implicitly denying the dependence of moral beings on God, and taking away his power to control their actions, and to execute the plan

of his own government. For if any man maintains that the special operation of the Holy Spirit, is incompatible with the moral freedom of man; how can he consistently maintain that agency of God in his providence, which is denied by none, but Atheists? And who that admits the Bible to contain truth unmixed with error, can doubt the constant agency of God in every part of the creation, and especially in the souls of his redeemed people?

It is in the manner above mentioned, that we explain the doctrine of divine influence. It has been explained substantially in this manner, from time immemorial. These relations of the subject to the moral government of God, and to the moral agency of man, and the qualifications which necessarily arise from them, have been insisted upon with no ordinary zeal, by the Orthodox Divines in New England. We assert neither the special agency of God in the kingdom of his grace, nor the common agency of God in his providence, without asserting or implying that the agency is such, as secures to man the unimpaired exercise of all his rational and moral powers, —such as preserves his moral freedom entire. We treat the whole subject in such a way, as evinces to every man of reflection, that we understand it with these qualifications. We speak of man, as being in the highest sense *active* in repenting, believing, and obeying. We represent repentance, and obedience, as his duty, and labor to persuade him to perform them. We urge motives to influence him, as a moral agent; we present to him the rewards of obedience, and the punishment of disobedience; we exhort and reprove him, and in all respects treat him in such a manner, as shows, that we believe the doctrine of man's moral agency, as firmly, as we believe that of the divine influence.

If our opponents can prove, that our views of the divine influence certainly lead to the denial of man's freedom and accountableness, as a moral agent, they may justly charge us with holding principles, from which such consequences do in fact follow ; though they cannot charge us with holding those consequences.—But why should our views be considered as involving such consequences ? Is it because we assert the divine influence to be *powerful and effectual* ? But how does it appear, that an influence upon the mind, which is perfectly suited to its nature, and its faculties, has any more tendency to make man a machine, or to destroy his agency, when it is powerful enough effectually to accomplish its design, than when it fails of accomplishing it ? Is it so with us ? When we exert a powerful and effectual influence over a person, persuading him to relinquish some sinful indulgence, to which he was addicted, or to perform some virtuous action, to which he had a strong reluctance ; do we, on that account, look upon him, as any the less a free moral agent ? Do we regard that determination of his mind, and that conduct, to which we persuaded him, as having no virtue, because he was led to it by our persuasive influence ? Even if he should tell us, what is often a matter of fact, that the influence of our arguments was *overpowering, and irresistible* ; we should consider this as a proof, not of the loss of his free agency, but of the strength of our arguments ; and we should regard his ready submission to such arguments, as evidence of a sound understanding, and of a commendable disposition.

The mode, in which we exert our influence, is indeed widely different from that, in which the divine influence is exerted. But the consideration of this difference will furnish a new argument in favor of our doc-

trine. For surely he who made intelligent creatures, and who unerringly knows the powers and properties of the mind he gave them, and all its laws of action, must be able to adapt his influence to the nature of their mind more perfectly, than we can. These brief remarks are sufficient to show, how utterly they misconceive the subject, who think, as many seem to do, that the agency of God can extend only so far, can rise only to such a degree of efficacy, without interfering with the agency of man. The fact is, that the highest point of energy, to which the divine agency, thus exerted, can rise, interferes not in the least with the proper exercise of our rational and moral powers. The whole design and tendency of the influence, which the Holy Spirit exerts over us, is to unshackle the mind from corrupt passion and prejudice, and, instead of encumbering and destroying moral agency, to conform its free exercises to the rules of virtue, and so to improve and elevate all the moral faculties.

I ask again ; is it supposed that the divine influence, which we assert, is incompatible with moral agency, because God exerts it upon us in a way so different from that, in which we exert our influence ; that is, without the use of language, or any outward signs ; or because we do not perceive its operation upon us, as distinct from the acts of our own minds ? To this I would reply ; that the invisibleness of the divine influence no more proves that it is not real and efficacious, than the invisibleness of the Creator, or the act of creative power, proves that the Creator does not exist, or that his creative power was never exerted. Could we stand, as spectators, to witness the creation of a world ; we should only see the *effect produced*. The cause would be *invisible*. But would this occasion any doubt, as to the *reality* of that cause ?—As to the use of language and other out-



ward signs ; it shows our imperfection, that we can have access to the mind in no other way. The direct access, which our Creator has to the mind, is, in all respects superior to what we are capable of, and of course *his* influence, whatever might be said of *ours*, can never be supposed in the smallest degree to infringe moral agency.

But though we allow ourselves in the unfettered use of reason on this momentous subject, our ultimate reliance is on the oracles of truth. The inspired writers speak of the influence of the Spirit, as being in the highest degree *powerful* and *efficacious*, without the least appearance of apprehending that it is incompatible with human activity, or that there is any occasion to defend the doctrine against the objection above stated. Indeed they view the doctrine in a very different light, and make use of it, as a motive to activity. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do." In this practical use of the doctrine, there is the most evident propriety. For what can be a more animating encouragement to a man, who is struggling against the power of moral corruption, and is ready to sink under a sense of his weakness, than the assurance of that divine Spirit, which will help his infirmities, and render his efforts successful? As the end of the Spirit's influence is to subdue sinful affection, and excite that which is holy; the more powerful and efficacious that influence is understood to be, the more encouragement to diligence does the christian derive from it.

The grand difficulty, which attends this subject, seems to arise from the supposition of some analogy between the power of God upon the human heart, and that exercise of power among men, which overcomes or supersedes voluntary agency; in other words, that which shows itself in cases of *coercion* or *force*.

If they who object to our doctrine, as incompatible with man's free agency, will examine their own thoughts carefully, they will find, I think, that their objection arises chiefly from the supposition of this analogy ;—that it arises from the habit of comparing the effectual operation of the divine power on the mind and heart, with instances, in which men are constrained by superior force, to do or suffer that, which is against their choice. Such analogy we deny altogether ; and we deny every conclusion drawn from it.

I cannot leave this part of the subject, without remarking on the unfairness of our opponents, in going to such an extreme, as they generally do, in giving a construction to the words, *irresistible, overpowering, invincible, &c.* when applied to the divine influence. Although I am by no means fond of a very copious use of such terms ; yet I owe it to those who employ them more freely, to say, that these words are in good use, in relation to this general subject, and, all prejudice aside, will bear a sense perfectly unexceptionable. This I say, *first*, from a consideration of *the nature of the case*. Whenever these words are used, they are to be understood *relatively* ; and the subject generally shows, to what they relate. If I speak of an irresistible or overpowering *argument*, I speak of it with reference to that, which might be supposed to make resistance, or to that which is to be overcome ; i.e. I speak of it with reference to some reason or objection, which has been urged against the point to be proved, but which is now made to appear without force, or yields to an argument of *superior* force. Or the terms may relate to some opposing prejudice or passion, which is now weakened and subdued by the strength of the reasoning, or the persuasiveness of the eloquence, directed against it. In a manner like this, we are always

understood, when we speak of an *irresistible* or *overpowering* argument. The terms, in such a case, are never supposed to imply, that the understanding, or the conscience is the thing that is overcome, or subdued; and for the plain reason, that the force of an argument, however great, cannot produce such an effect. In many cases, the direct tendency of the *irresistible* argument is to illuminate and strengthen the moral faculties of the mind, or to subdue that by which they were blinded and weakened. Now who was ever so weak as to imagine, that an *irresistible, overpowering* argument had any tendency to break the mental faculties or to prevent the freedom of their operation in any movement of moral agency? We are accustomed to use these terms freely, and without fear of being misunderstood, in relation to any influence, which a man exercises over the minds and moral actions of others, either by his eloquence, his generosity, or his superior wisdom and piety.

I would have it remembered, that, by this illustration, I mean only to evince, that the words *irresistible*, *unconquerable*, &c. when applied by Calvinistic writers to the influence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men, are not justly liable to the objection commonly urged against them; because the nature of the case shows, to what they must relate. When we represent the influence of the Holy Spirit in sanctifying the hearts of men, as *irresistible*, or *overpowering*, we speak solely with reference to that, which is supposed to make resistance, or is to be overcome. Now in the divine work of sanctifying the hearts of men, or causing them to love God, is it possible to suppose, that *moral agency* is to be overcome? If their moral agency should in fact be overcome, would that help to make them holy? And can any

think that we mean to assert this? The thing to be overcome by the divine influence, is sinful inclination, corrupt affection. Men naturally love the creature more than the Creator. They are earthly in their desires, and have a disrelish for divine things. This is their disorder,—the disease of their souls. The influence of the Spirit bears upon this moral disease. When we say, that influence is *irresistible*, and *overpowering*, our meaning is, that this disease of the soul, though very powerful and stubborn, is made to yield to the merciful agency of the divine Physician;—that the remedy becomes *effectual*. The question really is, whether the *successful* operation of the divine Spirit,—in other words, whether the *efficaciousness* of the remedy, applied to the spiritual disorder of man, is destructive of his moral agency? There is, in my view, just as much reason to ask, whether the *efficaciousness* of the remedy, which is applied for the cure of a *fever*, is destructive of moral agency. I take it as an admission of all, who call themselves Christians, that the moral disease of man is *capable* of a *cure*, and that it is most desirable, that it should be cured. If it is cured, it must be by a remedy suited to the nature of the disorder. What the nature of the disorder is, God perfectly knows; and is perfectly able to apply a *suitable* and *efficacious* remedy. Now when this almighty Physician kindly undertakes the cure of our souls, the obstinacy of the disorder yields; its resistance is taken away; that is to say, the heart is effectually cleansed from its pollution; love of sin, enmity to God, pride, ingratitude, and selfish, earthly desires are *subdued*, and man is induced to love God, and obey his commands. In other words, the sinner is so influenced by the Spirit of God, that he *freely* forsakes his sins, and, with all readiness of mind, devotes himself to the service of

Christ. And this is the same as saying, that, instead of exercising his moral agency *wrong*, he now exercises it *right*. The nature of the case shows, that this is and must be the meaning of the words under consideration, when applied by intelligent Christians to the influence of the Holy Spirit. I say therefore, that they will bear a sense perfectly unexceptionable ; and that this is the sense, which naturally occurs, and which, for this very reason, every man is obliged, by the rules of candor and sound criticism, to put upon them.

I have a second reason for thinking that those, who use the terms under consideration, mean to use them in a sense, which does not infringe moral agency ; and that is, that they uniformly speak of man, even when he is supposed to be the subject of that very irresistible influence, as exercising an unimpaired freedom, and agency ; as *choosing* holiness, *refusing* sin, *loving* God, *obeying* the gospel. These are certainly acts of a free, moral, accountable creature, and, as clearly as any thing, can show the properties of a *moral agent*. The plain meaning of those, who speak of the influence of the Spirit, as irresistible, or overpowering, must therefore be, that the divine influence not only is *consistent* with moral agency, but actually produces, as its proper effect, the free exercise of moral agency, in all those modes of it, which are required by the commands of God.

Now considering that the terms, which have been thus freely examined, are commonly used in cases somewhat similar to that of the divine influence, without ever being supposed to imply any thing repugnant to the most perfect moral agency ; considering also, that, when they are used in reference to that influence, the nature of the subject shows to what they must relate, and in what sense they must be taken ; and considering, finally, that

those, who use them, make it perfectly manifest by other language respecting the same subject, that they mean nothing, which can interfere with any of the principles of moral action; I appeal to you, my respected readers, whether the outcry, which has been made against what is called the *resistless, overpowering* influence of the Holy Ghost in the conversion of sinners, is consistent with candor, or with justice? I have long been convinced, that there is a palpable unfairness and violence in the treatment, which the Orthodox have received on this subject. If, in describing the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, any of us use language, that is strong and impressive,—language which points to the power and obstinacy of the evil to be overcome, and to the certain efficaciousness of the remedy applied; our opposers labor to put upon that language the most unfavorable construction possible. Instead of kindly and fairly inquiring whether our words will admit of an unexceptionable meaning, and whether that unexceptionable meaning is the one which we aim to express; do they not, in many instances, make it their object to find out, if possible, some meaning, which shall be marked with absurdity, and which shall, at any rate, expose to contempt the sentiment they wish to confute? This is a heavier allegation than I am fond of bringing against any respectable men. But I cheerfully leave it to others to decide, whether the attempts which have frequently been made to decry this most precious doctrine of the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit in renewing and sanctifying the hearts of sinners, together with the want of candor, the heat of feeling, and the vehemence of expression, which have been exhibited by at least some of our opposers, do, or do not prove the allegation just.

I cannot close this letter without expressing my as-

tonishment, that any who profess to be Christians, should set themselves against the doctrine of the divine influence. For if we see a moral disorder in ourselves, which we wish to be subdued; it would be reasonable to suppose, that we should set a high price upon any thing, which would assist us in subduing it. And if the word of God reveals a divine agent, whose almighty energy effectually subdues the power of sin; those who have any right feelings, must prize this, as a most precious discovery. They must seek this heavenly influence, as the most important blessing, earnestly desiring, that it may be exerted upon their hearts. The greater its energy, the more highly do they value it. Instead of feeling any objection against the notion of its being *irresistible* and *overpowering*, they most sincerely pray that it may be so. They know it is directed to the one grand work of subduing sin, of purifying the heart, and guiding into the truth. They wish this work to be done effectually. Every thing in them, which makes resistance, they wish may be overcome. Their prayer is, "let the influence of the Holy Spirit be too powerful to be resisted. Our own efforts must be unavailing, unless aided from above. May God work effectually in us both to will and to do. We crave the operation of that efficacious, invincible power, which will subdue every corrupt affection, and sanctify us throughout in body, soul and spirit."—Such must be the cordial prayer of every one, who knows himself, and has a desire to be like the blessed Jesus. And I am constrained again to express my astonishment, that any can be found, who calumniate or despise that doctrine of divine influence, which is one of the most distinguishing and most attractive features of the Christian religion.

## LETTER X.

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS,

IN the foregoing letters, I have endeavored to arrange my remarks on the principal doctrines embraced by the Orthodox, with as much regard to order and connexion, as possible. In consequence of this, I find I have omitted several passages in the Sermon before me, to which particular attention seemed to be due. It has not been my object to animadvert on every sentence, which I might deem exceptionable. But there are in the Sermon a few passages of a general character, which I have not yet brought into view, but which cannot justly be suffered to pass unnoticed. To these I would now for a short time invite your attention.

I have already remarked on what I consider a palpable instance of injustice in many Unitarian writers; namely; that they represent certain opinions to be peculiarly and exclusively theirs, when in reality they are embraced and inculcated by the Orthodox. The Sermon furnishes some examples of this, in respect to the mediation of Christ, besides what I have before noticed. The author, in pursuance of his general design, gives a summary account of the views, which he and his brethren entertain on this subject, and which, according to his representation, distinguish Unitarians from the Orthodox. But with respect to these views *substantially*,—I must say, they form no such distinction. If Unitarians hold them, there is, thus far, no controversy between them and us. And the agreement of the two parties in these views, should have been asserted; just



as we assert that they are agreed in believing the existence of a God, and the doctrine of a resurrection. So that if, by professing these views, the Author gets any credit to himself and his brethren, exclusively of the Orthodox, he gets it unfairly.

The principal of these views respecting the mediation of Christ, I shall now quote from the Sermon; and as I wish to make all convenient despatch, I shall take the liberty at the same time to repeat them, as belonging to myself and my brethren.

“ We believe, that Christ was sent by the Father to effect a moral, or spiritual deliverance of mankind; that is, to rescue men from sin and its consequences, and to bring them to a state of everlasting purity and happiness. We believe, too, that he accomplishes this sublime purpose by a variety of methods; by his instructions respecting God’s unity, parental character, and moral government, which are admirably fitted to reclaim the world from idolatry, and impiety, to the knowledge, love, and obedience of the Creator; by his promises of pardon to the penitent, and of divine assistance to those, who labour for progress in moral excellence: by the light which he has thrown on the path of duty; by his own spotless example, in which the loveliness and sublimity of virtue shine forth to warm and quicken, as well as guide us to perfection; by his threatenings against incorrigible guilt; by his glorious discoveries of immortality; by his sufferings and death; by that signal event, the resurrection, which powerfully bore witness to his divine mission, and brought down to men’s senses a future life; by his continual intercession, which obtains for us spiritual aid and blessings; and by the power with which he is invested of raising the dead, judging the world, and conferring the everlasting rewards, promised to the faithful.”——“ We believe, that Jesus, instead of making the Father merciful, is sent by the Father’s mercy to be our Saviour; that he is nothing to the human race, but what he is by God’s appointment; that he communicates nothing but what God empowers him to bestow; that our father in heaven is originally, essentially and eternally placable, and disposed to forgive; and that his unborrowed, underived, and unchangeable love, is the only fountain of what flows to us through his Son. We conceive, that Jesus is dishonoured, not glorified, by as-

cribing to him an influence, which clouds the splendour of divine benevolence.”——“Whilst we gratefully acknowledge, that he came to rescue us from punishment, we believe, that he was sent on a still nobler errand, namely, to deliver us from sin itself, and to form us to a sublime and heavenly virtue. We regard him as a Saviour, chiefly as he is the light, physician, and guide of the dark, diseased, and wandering mind. No influence in the universe seems to us so glorious, as that over the character; and no redemption so worthy of thankfulness, as the restoration of the soul to purity. Without this, pardon, were it possible, would be of little value. Why pluck the sinner from hell, if a hell be left to burn in his own breast? Why raise him to heaven, if he remain a stranger to its sanctity and love?”——“We believe, that faith in this religion, is of no worth, and contributes nothing to salvation, any farther than as it uses these doctrines, precepts, promises, and the whole life, character, sufferings, and triumphs of Jesus, as the means of purifying the mind, and of changing it into the likeness of his celestial excellence.”

These views are all ours; and we are happy to express them in the simple, elegant, and forcible language of this Sermon. And we would indulge the hope, that the injustice of representing them as *peculiar* to Unitarians, in distinction from the Orthodox, will not soon be repeated.—We have, indeed, other and higher views, as you may have already perceived, respecting the mediation of Christ; but none incompatible with these. And let me say, it is very evident to us, that those other and higher views, which are peculiar to the Orthodox, respecting the atonement and mediation of Christ, invest all the practical views, above exhibited, with new beauty and force, and render them, in a higher degree, effectual in promoting a devout and holy life.

I now proceed, with increasing surprise, to notice the same species of injustice, respecting *the nature of christian virtue, or holiness*. The injustice, which I now charge against this Sermon, lies in this;—that Orthodox ministers and Christians, especially those in New Eng-

land, are held up to public view, as rejecting the sentiments here referred to, respecting the nature of holiness, when, in fact, all that is particularly valuable in these sentiments, is insisted upon, and abundantly illustrated by various Orthodox writers, whom we hold in the highest estimation. Those, who are acquainted with the writings of the most respectable Divines in New England, and those who have stately heard the preaching of Orthodox ministers of the present age, and who know the general sentiments of Orthodox Christians, will have no difficulty in determining, whether impartial justice is here rendered us. I speak in the name of my brethren generally. Do not we believe, as well as Unitarians, "that the moral faculties of man are the grounds of responsibility, and the highest distinctions of our nature, and that no act is praiseworthy, any farther than it springs from their exertion?" When we speak of the influence of God's Spirit on the mind of man, do not we, as well as Unitarians, "mean a moral, illuminating, and persuasive influence, not physical, not compulsory?" Do not we, as well as they, "give the first place among the virtues, to the love of God?" Do not we believe, "that this principle is the true end and happiness of our being; that we were made for union with our Creator; that his infinite perfection is the only sufficient object and true resting place for the insatiable desires and unlimited capacities of the human mind;—that the love of God is not only essential to happiness, but to the strength and perfection of all the virtues; that conscience, without the sanction of God's authority and retributive justice, would be a weak director; that benevolence, unless nourished by communion with his goodness,—could not thrive amidst the selfishness and thanklessness of the world,

—and that God—is the life, motive and sustainer of virtue in the human soul?”

Do not we believe, as well as this Author and his brethren, “that great care is necessary to distinguish the love of God from its counterfeits?” Do not we “think that much, which is called piety, is worthless?” Should not we be as ready, as they are, to say, that, “if religion be the shipwreck of the understanding, we cannot keep too far from it;”—and “to maintain that fanaticism, partial insanity,—and ungovernable transports, are any thing rather than piety?” Is it not as favorite an opinion with us, as with them, “that the true love of God is a moral sentiment, founded on a clear perception, and consisting in a high esteem and veneration of his moral perfections?”—This Author says in the name of his brethren; “We esteem *him*, and *him only*, a pious man, who practically conforms to God’s moral perfection and government; who shows his delight in God’s benevolence by loving and serving his neighbor; his delight in God’s justice by being resolutely upright; his sense of God’s purity, by regulating his thoughts, imagination, and desires; and whose business, conversation and life are swayed by a regard to God’s presence and authority. In all things else, men may deceive themselves. Disordered nerves may give them strange sights, and sounds, and impressions. Texts of Scripture may come to them, as from heaven. Their souls may be moved, and their confidence in God’s favour be undoubting. But in all this there is no religion. The question is, do they love God’s commands,—and give up to these their habits and passions? Without this, ecstasy is a mockery. One surrender of desire to God’s will is worth a thousand transports. We do not judge of the bent of men’s minds by their raptures, any more than we judge of the direction

of a tree during a storm. We rather suspect loud profession; for we have observed, that deep feeling is generally noiseless, and least seeks display."

To all these views we most cordially subscribe. A man, who should undertake to exhibit elegantly, and in a few words, what Edwards wrote on Religious Affections, could not do it better, than in the language of this Author. Edwards, and Bellamy, and many other authors, most beloved, and most frequently perused, among the Orthodox in New England, have labored with great assiduity and success, to distinguish true religion from its various counterfeits, to put down all the excitements and transports which spring from human imagination or passion, and to recommend that religion, which consists in conformity to God's moral character, and obedience to his law. And if the Author of this Sermon should call to mind all the theological works, with which he was once conversant, he would not improbably find, that in regard to these very sentiments, which he represents as peculiar to Unitarians, he is under no small obligation to Orthodox writers. No writers have ever shown better than those above mentioned, "that religious warmth is only to be valued, when it springs naturally from an improved character; when it comes unforced;—when it is the warmth of a mind, which understands God by being like him; and when instead of disordering, it exalts the understanding, invigorates conscience, gives a pleasure to common duties, and is seen to exist in connexion with cheerfulness, judiciousness, and a reasonable frame of mind."—This Sermon simply asserts these just and important sentiments; but the writers above named, have largely illustrated and confirmed them. And with Orthodox ministers in New England,

this distinction between true piety and its counterfeits is, more than almost any thing else, the subject of preaching and conversation. Probably however, we still fall short of our duty. And we ought to deem it a favor, if any one shall come forward to chastise our negligence, and to excite us to greater seriousness and fidelity in this momentous concern, even though we may be conscious that he does it, by denying us the credit of sentiments, which we hold precious as our life.

This Author proceeds. "Another important branch of religion, we believe to be love to Christ. The greatness of the work of Jesus, the spirit with which he executed it, and the sufferings which he bore for our salvation, we feel to be strong claims on our gratitude and veneration. We see in nature no beauty to be compared with the loveliness of his character; nor do we find on earth a benefactor, to whom we owe an equal debt."—Does all the honor and happiness of entertaining such views as these, belong exclusively to Unitarians? Do these sentiments respecting Christ distinguish them from the Orthodox?—I would ask the same questions respecting most of the observations, which this Author makes on the *benevolent virtues*? Is it a *peculiar, distinguishing* mark of Unitarians, to attach great importance to these virtues? Let any man read the books, or hear the preaching, which we most admire, and then say.

Without proceeding any farther, it could not but be evident to my readers, that they cannot unhesitatingly, and without examination, repose full confidence in the representations, which are found in this Sermon, respecting the sentiments of the Orthodox.—On such a subject as this, and with respect to such a writer, I should have preferred silence, had not justice required me to speak.

I knew it could not be made consistent with truth and  
 ety, that those ministers and Christians, who are  
 ted Orthodox, should lie under the reproach of  
 great number of the most obvious principles of  
 inciples, which they believe to be of vital  
 to the system of Christianity, and which they  
 with a seriousness and ardor, which bear ample  
 mony to the sincerity of their faith.

On this particular subject, as well as on every other, which  
 is introduced into these Letters, I feel happy, in address-  
 ing myself to those, who have chosen *candor and liberali-  
 ty*, as the honorable badge of their party. Let me ask  
 you, then, my respected friends, whether it can detract  
 any thing from the *value* of those truths, which you be-  
 lieve, that they are believed also by the Orthodox; and  
 whether the *honor* of believing such truths would be any  
 the less to you, if it should be shared equally by us?—  
 What end, then, can this Author seek to accomplish, by  
 making a selection of some of the most unexceptionable,  
 most amiable, most attractive truths of religion, and rep-  
 resenting them as belonging peculiarly to Unitarians, and  
 as distinguishing them from us,—when in fact we believe  
 them, to say the least, as sincerely as they do? Possi-  
 bly credit and influence may, by such means, be secur-  
 ed to Unitarians. But there are men, who will in-  
 quire, whether they are secured *justly*? Possibly re-  
 proach or disgrace may, by the same means, be cast up-  
 on us. But is it *deserved*? And pray tell me, what  
 good end can be answered by possessing credit, which  
 is unjustly acquired, or by inflicting disgrace, which is  
 not merited?—This Author advances much, to which we  
 most cheerfully subscribe, in praise of candor and chari-  
 table judgment toward those, who differ from us in re-  
 ligious opinion. Referring to this, he says; “There is

think that we mean to assert this? The thing to be overcome by the divine influence, is sinful inclination, corrupt affection. Men naturally love the creature more than the Creator. They are earthly in their desires, and have a disrelish for divine things. This is their disorder,—the disease of their souls. The influence of the Spirit bears upon this moral disease. When we say, that influence is *irresistible*, and *overpowering*, our meaning is, that this disease of the soul, though very powerful and stubborn, is made to yield to the merciful agency of the divine Physician;—that the remedy becomes *effectual*. The question really is, whether the *successful* operation of the divine Spirit,—in other words, whether the *efficaciousness* of the remedy, applied to the spiritual disorder of man, is destructive of his moral agency? There is, in my view, just as much reason to ask, whether the *efficaciousness* of the remedy, which is applied for the cure of a *fever*, is destructive of moral agency. I take it as an admission of all, who call themselves Christians, that the moral disease of man is *capable* of a *cure*, and that it is most desirable, that it should be cured. If it is cured, it must be by a remedy suited to the nature of the disorder. What the nature of the disorder is, God perfectly knows; and is perfectly able to apply a *suitable* and *efficacious* remedy. Now when this almighty Physician kindly undertakes the cure of our souls, the obstinacy of the disorder yields; its resistance is taken away; that is to say, the heart is effectually cleansed from its pollution; love of sin, enmity to God, pride, ingratitude, and selfish, earthly desires are *subdued*, and man is induced to love God, and obey his commands. In other words, the sinner is so influenced by the Spirit of God, that he *freely* forsakes his sins, and, with all readiness of mind, devotes himself to the service of



Christ. And this is the same as saying, that, instead of exercising his moral agency *wrong*, he now exercises it *right*. The nature of the case shows, that this is and must be the meaning of the words under consideration, when applied by intelligent Christians to the influence of the Holy Spirit. I say therefore, that they will bear a sense perfectly unexceptionable ; and that this is the sense, which naturally occurs, and which, for this very reason, every man is obliged, by the rules of candor and sound criticism, to put upon them.

I have a second reason for thinking that those, who use the terms under consideration, mean to use them in a sense, which does not infringe moral agency ; and that is, that they uniformly speak of man, even when he is supposed to be the subject of that very irresistible influence, as exercising an unimpaired freedom, and agency ; as *choosing* holiness, *refusing* sin, *loving* God, *obeying* the gospel. These are certainly acts of a free, moral, accountable creature, and, as clearly as any thing, can show the properties of a *moral agent*. The plain meaning of those, who speak of the influence of the Spirit, as irresistible, or overpowering, must therefore be, that the divine influence not only is *consistent* with moral agency, but actually produces, as its proper effect, the free exercise of moral agency, in all those modes of it, which are required by the commands of God.

Now considering that the terms, which have been thus freely examined, are commonly used in cases somewhat similar to that of the divine influence, without ever being supposed to imply any thing repugnant to the most perfect moral agency ; considering also, that, when they are used in reference to that influence, the nature of the subject shows to what they must relate, and in what sense they must be taken ; and considering, finally, that

threats, than if they were perfectly free from corruption ; they give a representation of our views, as really incorrect, as if they should accuse us of holding, that, in consequence of men's depravity, they have no eyes to see the light of the sun, and no ears to hear the noise of thunder.

If there is any principle respecting the moral government of God, which the Orthodox clergy in New England earnestly labor to inculcate, it is this ; that, as accountable beings, *we have a conscience, and a power of knowing and performing our duty.* Our zeal in defence of this principle has been such, as to occasion no small umbrage to some, who are attached to every feature and every phraseology of Calvinism. On this subject, there is, in fact, a well known difference between our views, and those of some modern, as well as more ancient Divines, who rank high on the side of Orthodoxy. I urge it, therefore, as a matter of justice, that how earnestly soever the Author of this Sermon might have been disposed to censure the opinions of others, he ought to have made an express exception in *our* favor. And considering what advantages he has had of being acquainted with the modes of thinking and preaching, which generally prevail among the Orthodox ministers of New England, I hardly know how christian candor ought to shape its apology for this oversight.

It is readily admitted, that some men may be found among us, whom we venerate and honor, as advocates for true religion, who yet have preached or written obscurely, or confusedly, on the subject of depravity, free agency, and a moral government. But surely, we are not, as a body, to be charged with entertaining all the opinions, and with justifying all the expressions of every man, who believes generally the principles of Ortho-

doxy. I am confident, that you would strongly condemn us, if we should treat you in such a manner as this. Should I, in these Letters, impute to you, as a Society of Unitarians, all the extravagancies of opinion, which some German, English, or American Unitarians have held, and all the rashness and violence of language, which they have employed; you would doubtless think me guilty of acting contrary to fairness and equity. I have endeavored to avoid the most distant approach to this species of unfairness; and therefore have purposely refrained from associating passages in this Sermon with passages from those Unitarian writers, against whom the greatest public odium has been excited.—Now on the other hand; suppose you find in an author, or hear from a preacher, reputed Orthodox, an unguarded expression on the subject of depravity, or moral agency, or on any other subject,—an expression liable, at least, to misconstruction, and suited to excite prejudice against Orthodoxy; will you impute that expression, or the opinion conveyed by it, to the Orthodox generally? We may perhaps consider the expression, and the opinion, as exceptionable, as you do; and it may be as really contrary to truth, for you to impute them to us, as for us to impute them to you.—The question is, have we authorised that writer, or that preacher, to speak in our name, and publicly to make known our faith? Or have we ever, in any form, declared our unqualified assent to his opinions, or professed those which are like them? If not, why should every speculation and every expression of his be charged to our account? Infidels may just as well charge upon the whole community of Christians, the irregularities and vices of every individual, who is regarded as belonging to that community. There have been, within a few

years, some instances of this kind of unfairness towards the Orthodox generally, and particularly towards some of the subdivisions among them, which cannot but be reprobated by all men, who possess common justice, or common sense.

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## LETTER XI.

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS,

I have reserved, as the last subject of discussion in these Letters, *the practical influence, or tendency* of the system, embraced by the Orthodox.

To my mind, it is exceedingly obvious, that representations are often made on this subject, which are radically erroneous, and that, by these means, an impression is produced on the feelings of many, hostile at once to their personal welfare, and to the interests of religion. Such representations ought to be corrected, and the subject, which must, by both parties, be considered as highly important, to be set in a true light. The salutary influence of the Orthodox system has been often illustrated, and has appeared to me so perfectly clear, that it has been a matter of astonishment, that any intelligent man should entertain a doubt respecting it. The most candid construction, which I have been able to put upon the opinions and representations of our opponents, as to the practical tendency of Orthodoxy, is, that they take an erroneous view of the system itself. They behold it in a false light. They overlook its genuine features, and see, or think they see deformities, from which it is wholly free. Now admitting that

the system does appear thus in their view, I can easily account for it, that they should believe its moral tendency to be so mischievous. If the system of the Orthodox were, in truth, what Priestley, and Fellowes, and Belsham, and even the Author of this Sermon have represented it to be ; its consequences would indeed be *pernicious*. So I might say, if Christianity were, in truth, that monstrous thing, which infidel philosophers have represented it to be ; the opposition and hatred, which have risen up against it, would have been just. But it is not so. And the Advocates for Christianity have a right to say, and are bound to say, and to prove, that it is a system of consummate excellence ; that the enmity of its opposers against it, has been altogether unjust and criminal ; that it merits the highest attachment, and that, to all its friends, it is fraught with inestimable blessings. I would not make a reproachful comparison. But we know, that the Orthodox system is not what Unitarians have declared it to be. Its genuine features are not seen at all in the picture, which they have drawn of it. Now the question to be discussed in this Letter, is, not whether such a system of doctrines, as Unitarians impute to the Orthodox, is mischievous in its tendency ; but what is the influence of *that system*, which we *really believe, and teach* ?

The Author of this Sermon thinks, that it is “ unfavorable to devotion ; ” — “ that it takes from the Father the Supreme affection which is his due, and transfers it to the Son ; ” — “ that it awakens human transport, rather than that deep veneration of the moral perfections of God, which is the essence of piety ; ” — “ that it robs Christ’s death of interest, — weakens our sympathy with his sufferings, and is, of all others, most unfavorable to a love of Christ, founded on a sense of his sacrifices for

mankind ;"—" that it discourages the timid, gives excuses to the bad, feeds the vanity of the fanatical, and offers shelter to the feelings of the malignant ;"—" that it tends strongly to pervert the moral faculty, to form a gloomy, forbidding, and servile religion, and to lead men to substitute censoriousness, bitterness, and persecution, for a tender and impartial charity ;"—that it is a " system, which begins with degrading human nature, and may be expected to end in pride."—Priestley, Belsham, and others, in perfect accordance with this Author, have represented the system of Orthodoxy to be *rigorous, gloomy, and horrible,—the extravagance of error,—a mischievous compound of impiety and idolatry.*

It would be a sad case, if the Unitarians above named, had no better proof to offer of a candid, liberal spirit, than what they have given in these heavy, but unsupported charges,—these harsh and causeless censures. I might very safely leave such censures as these, without any remark,—trusting that their extreme violence would be sufficiently visible to counteract any unfavorable effect, which they might be likely to produce.—But I have another object in view, which requires me not to pass over this subject lightly. I wish, in as comprehensive a manner as possible, to give a direct elucidation of the salutary influence of the system, which the Orthodox believe. The confutation of particular charges, as far as necessary, may be found in this general elucidation.

I shall first inquire, whether the grand and obvious properties of that system of religion, which we believe, are not adapted to produce a good influence in a general view, on those who embrace it. After this, I shall advert to some particular parts of Christian virtue and duty, and inquire in what way they are likely to be affected by the Orthodox system.

What then are the grand, obvious properties, which a system of religion must have, in order to produce a good influence on the character and practice of those who embrace it?

*First.* It must exhibit a *Being of infinite perfection, as the object of worship.* If there is any thing faulty in the character of him, whom we worship, it will, according to a well known principle, have a bad effect upon our character. But the God whom *we* love and adore, must not be described by our opposers. Or if they do describe him, their description must not be received, instead of ours. The Orthodox have described the character of God, as infinite and immutable in every divine perfection, both natural and moral; as amiable and glorious in the highest possible degree. Is not such a God worthy of supreme love and adoration? And can the sincere worship of such a Being fail to promote moral purity in us? Can it be otherwise, than that the habit of affectionately and devoutly contemplating the perfect justice and benevolence, which we ascribe to God, must have a powerful tendency to make us just and benevolent? I know we are accused of worshipping a Being, who is unjust, partial, and malignant. And it is a matter of course that we should be accused of imitating that injustice, partiality and malignity, which are thought to belong to the character of him, whom we worship. But it remains to be proved, that such attributes do in fact belong to the character, which is the object of our adoration. It has often been affirmed by our opponents; but the unsupported affirmation, that we worship an unjust, malignant Being, cannot surely be admitted as proof, in opposition to the most sober declaration on our part, that we ascribe to God infinite justice and benevolence. But there can be no

occasion to enlarge on this topic, after what I have written, in Letter III. To that I refer you. And if you have carefully attended to the views there expressed, of the character of Jehovah, and can have confidence enough in me to believe, that they are indeed the views, which I and my brethren entertain ; I will add nothing, but an appeal to your judgment, whether the worship of such a God can be otherwise than salutary to the cause of virtue ?

*Secondly.* A scheme of religion, in order to have a good moral influence, must exhibit *a moral government, marked with holiness and righteousness throughout.* There must be a holy and benevolent Sovereign, who, by a system of wise and good laws, requires of his subjects that conduct, which is necessary to the order and happiness of his kingdom. In his administration, he must show a constant regard to the principles of his government, and an invariable determination to give them support and efficiency. The authority of the law, and the character of holiness and justice in the Lawgiver must be sustained, by the influence of a penalty ;—a penalty, the execution of which shall spread an impression of awe through the universe, at the sight of God's high displeasure against sin. Now does not the system of religion, which the Orthodox maintain, exhibit a moral government possessing all these properties ? Does it not constantly hold up to view, a Supreme Ruler, perfectly holy and benevolent ? Does it not inculcate upon all men, a wise and holy law, in all its extent, as of immutable obligation ? Does it not constantly teach, that the Governor of the world loves holiness, and abhors sin, and that he manifests an invariable determination to support the principles of a righteous moral government ? Does it not exhibit with tremendous force, the sanctions of the



law,—that is, the everlasting happiness of the obedient, and the everlasting punishment of transgressors? Is not the penalty of the law, as we represent it, awful in the highest degree, and so fitted, as far as any thing of the nature of penalty can be, to prevent transgression? So far as men are to be influenced by *fear*, will they not be prompted to a careful obedience, according to their impression of the certainty and the greatness of the evil, which will be consequent upon sin? In this respect, has not the Orthodox system most obviously the advantage over its opposite? Have we not always been reproached by those, who would gladly lower down or disannul the sanctions of the law, for displaying in too strong colors the certainty and the dreadfulness of future punishment? And is it not true, that those, who soberly admit the views, which we give, of the displeasure of God against sin, and the punishment with which he will recompense it, find it more difficult, than others, to keep their minds in a state of inconsideration, and sinful repose?—I am willing to make the appeal to all attentive observers, whether there is not, in fact, the greatest and most sensible repugnancy between a life of ungodliness, and the representation we make of the divine government? And, in truth, does not this fact account for much of the opposition, which our views of religion have always had to encounter among men, who are too proud to bear reproof, too fond of quiet, to submit willingly to what would disturb and alarm them, and too earthly, to yield to the attractions of a devout and spiritual life?

That the interests of virtue may be secure, *the exercise of mercy towards offenders*, whenever it takes place, must be so regulated, that the divine law shall be magnified, and its sanctions exercise all their power over the

consciences and hearts of men. This is one of the *grand points* in the Orthodox system. I shall not now enter on the particulars, which make up the system in this respect, but shall merely state, what we conceive to be fairly its practical result, and on account of which, more than for any other reason, we feel so much interest in its support.

According to our views of the intervention of Christ, the salvation of sinners reflects no dishonor upon the character of God, as a moral Governor. He appears to his subjects, as just and true, and awakens as deep an awe in their minds, when he *forgives*, as when he *punishes*. In consequence of this, God's rational creatures find in his administration as powerful motives to deter them from transgression, and induce them to obedience, as if they saw in fact, that the penalty of the law was, in all its dreadfulness, inflicted upon every transgressor. So that, while rebels against God are pardoned, his law loses none of its authority or influence; the interests of virtue are not sacrificed; and the glory of justice and truth is in no degree tarnished. Nay, all the attributes of God acquire the lustre of a higher display, and all the principles of his benevolent and righteous government, a more powerful ascendancy. Accordingly, those who are placed under this dispensation of mercy, are moved to repentance and obedience by the high authority of a perfect moral government, and by all the attractions of infinite compassion and grace. Thus our system of religion, in regard to the work of redemption, is calculated, in our view, to promote the cause of holiness in the highest degree. It is stamped with perfect holiness throughout. It exhibits a holy God, who is constantly engaged in administering a holy government. It proclaims a pure and holy

law, and enforces it with the most weighty sanctions. It brings to our view a holy Redeemer, who gave a perfect vindication and support to that law. It presents a holy salvation, to be obtained through the influence of a holy Intercessor, and by the persevering efforts of a holy faith. Every thing, with which we have to do in this great concern, bears the stamp of holiness, and tends to promote holiness in us.

Now tell me candidly, my respected friends, whether the system of Orthodoxy, some features of which have now been portrayed, is not of as holy a nature, and of as purifying a tendency, as the system which Unitarians adopt? Do we not exhibit as holy a God, as righteous a law, and as high sanctions to enforce it, as they do? Is not the tribunal to which we point men, as just, and the sentence, of which we forewarn them, as momentous and decisive, as that which Unitarians teach us to expect? Do we not hold forth a blessedness of as great worth, and a punishment as dreadful, as they?

In regard to the work of redemption; does not our scheme present as complete a vindication of the violated law and government of God, as theirs? Does it not show as much regard to the interests of virtue? Does it not demand holiness with as commanding an authority, and allure men to it by as melting a display of kindness? Does it not present as many and as bright examples of moral excellence, divine and human? What then is wanting to give the religious system, which we embrace, the most salutary influence upon the character and conduct of men?

As to practical influence, any religious system is, in reality, what it is to those who cordially embrace it, not what it is, or what it appears to be, to those who reject it. I doubt not, that a trial of the Orthodox system by

this rule, would end in its favor. Enlightened Christians, who seriously believe this system, do, if I mistake not, find in it motives, in great variety, and of powerful efficacy, to universal holiness.—I should however feel a strong reluctance, in reasoning on this subject, to do what some writers have done ; that is, to institute a comparison between the Orthodox and Unitarians, in respect of character. For although Orthodox believers have, in different periods, especially in these last days, achieved much for the welfare of man, and have, in many instances, exhibited an elevation of christian virtue, which has been an honor to the grace of God ; instances enough of a contrary character occur, to make us blush ; and even those, who have reached the highest point of goodness, have fallen far short of the attainments they ought to have made, under the influence of such powerful motives. Instead, therefore, of making any boasting comparisons, I would join with those who are humble and contrite in heart, in the deepest lamentations over that astonishing perverseness, which counteracts the influence of the most holy motives,—over that obstinate disease of our nature, which renders the best means of cure in so great a measure ineffectual.

But the fact, that the remedies, which physicians apply to the sick, are not always, and in the highest degree, efficacious, does not prove, that their *tendency* is not salutary, or that there is any thing more salutary.

In the case now under consideration, notwithstanding all the instances, in which the system of the Orthodox has failed of producing a salutary effect, we are still carefully to inquire into the *practical tendency* of the system, or the *moral influence* which it is *suited* to have, and in this respect, to compare it with the opposite system.

I shall proceed therefore, to the second thing proposed,—viz., to advert to particular parts of Christian virtue, and duty, and to inquire what influence the Orthodox system is likely to have upon them.

1. *Love to God.* The more exalted our conceptions of his natural and moral attributes, the more likely are we, other things being equal, to abound in love. Certainly, clear and elevated apprehensions of his glorious character have a stronger tendency to excite love, than those which are low and obscure. Now it is as evident to me, as the light of noon, that the system of Orthodoxy clearly exhibits the perfections of God, and invests them with the highest glory. It teaches us to acknowledge his infallible wisdom, and his unlimited benevolence in all his works. In view of all the evils, which fall to our lot, or to the lot of others, it teaches us not only to submit to his sovereign power, but to admire his paternal goodness. Those very measures of government, which our opponents think irreconcilable with his moral perfection, appear to us bright illustrations of it. In every point of view, the faith we embrace, is suited to excite love to God, and to give to that love the character of constancy and ardor.

2. *Gratitude to God.* In proportion to the impression we have of his kindness to us, will this affection be excited. If we believe that God, from the impulse of his own compassion, has bestowed upon us a favor of infinite value, and wholly undeserved; we shall feel a stronger motive to gratitude, than if we consider the favor bestowed, of inferior value, or suppose that we have any personal claim to it. According to this principle, those views of redemption, which we have been taught to consider, as the dictates of Scripture, are fitted to

raise gratitude to the highest pitch. We look upon ourselves to be in such a state, in consequence of our apostasy from God, that it is the greatest achievement of infinite benevolence, to save us. We see from what an abyss of guilt and wretchedness God delivers, and what an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory he bestows. And we see that this deliverance from guilt and wretchedness, and this eternal glory were purchased by the precious blood of Christ. With these views, we are constrained to anticipate that song, which is prompted by the gratitude of saints in heaven; "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, —to him be glory and dominion forever and ever."

With respect to gratitude, it is perfectly easy to make a comparison between the influence of our system, and that of our opponents. Unitarians may gratefully acknowledge the goodness of their Creator in forming and upholding them, and in the common bounties, with which his providence blesses them. They may admire his benevolence too, in providing, as they conceive he has done, for their happiness in a future state. And they may set a high price upon the various means of moral improvement, which they enjoy. But their system does not tend like ours, to excite those high and tender emotions of gratitude, which spring from a consciousness of deep criminality and unworthiness. It is easy to compare the sensations of a man, who has been rescued from the danger of perishing in the ocean, by some heroic effort of benevolence, with the sensations, which are produced by the common acts of kindness. It is easy to conceive too, how those sensations of the drowning man would be heightened, if his deliverance was effected by the disinterested kindness of one, whom he had often

wounded by injuries, and especially, if the danger, from which he was rescued, was the immediate consequence of an act of unprovoked hostility. Such a generous effort of compassion, heightened too by circumstances like these, would do all that an act of human kindness could do, to turn a heart of stone into a heart of flesh, to call forth all the tenderness of gratitude, and to fix a sense of obligation, never to be obliterated.

The principle of this comparison, with respect to the excitement of gratitude, is inseparable from our nature; and the result of the comparison will show, that the religious sentiments, which we entertain, are adapted not only to produce gratitude, but to give it the greatest degree of strength and tenderness, of which the human mind is capable. According to our scheme of faith, we are sinners without excuse. We have lifted up our hand against our Maker, and in instances too many to be numbered, proved ourselves his enemies. In consequence of this, we have brought ourselves upon the brink of hopeless destruction. Our Father in heaven has interposed, and by an act of love, unparalleled in strength and purity, and at an expense, which the creation could not pay, has delivered us from that hopeless destruction, and given us an inheritance in the heavens. Compared with this act of divine love, the noblest exploits of benevolence, ever performed by man, lose all their splendor, and all their power to move the heart. The kindness and grace of God, exercised towards us in this glorious work, will create a holy gratitude, which will swell the hearts of the redeemed forever, and transfuse a celestial ardor, inexpressibly delightful and pure, into their everlasting songs. Nor are those, who cordially yield themselves up to the influence of these views, strangers to

this holy affection, even now. It often glows in the heart of the young disciple of Christ. It often cheers the spirits of Christians, in every stage of their progress towards heaven, and prompts them to bless God for his goodness, even in affliction. It kindles a celestial light in their souls on the bed of languishing; and in the hour of death, it awakens in them sensibilities, which, amid the weakness and agonies of dissolving nature, struggle to utter themselves in, "thanks to God for his unspeakable gift."

3. *Love to Christ.* The bare mention of this virtue will lead at once to the obvious result of the comparison, which I have instituted between the two systems. For surely that system must be admitted to have the strongest tendency to excite love to Christ, which ascribes to him the highest excellence of character. The different systems of Unitarians ascribe to him various degrees of created and limited excellence. The Orthodox system clothes him with eternal and infinite excellence. Those who embrace this system, feel it to be their duty and privilege, to love Christ with the most exalted affection,—an affection without any limits, except those which arise from the finiteness of their capacities. But Unitarianism, in every form, forbids this high and unlimited affection to Christ. It tells us we are in danger of overrating his character. It begets a fear of regarding him with too high a veneration. When we have hearts, which wish to express their sacred ardor in the adoring language of Thomas, "my Lord and my God;" it thrusts itself before us, and tells us to forbear. Whereas the system of Orthodoxy calls us to raise our love to Christ to a higher and higher degree. It tells us he has an excellence and glory, which our affection can never reach. It makes our blessedness in a future world to consist



very much in clearer discoveries of his divine perfections, and in exercising towards him a more exalted, more uninterrupted love.

4. *Faith in Christ.* The same general remarks apply to this point, as to the last. Believing or trusting in the Savior is represented, as one of the grand, comprehensive duties of the Christian religion. But surely that faith or trust in Christ, which results from the principles of our opponents, must be a very different thing, from that which our system inculcates. Under the influence of the doctrines which we believe, we repose a confidence in his atoning blood, which relieves us from the agitations of guilt, and inspires us with humble, joyful hope; a confidence in his power, and wisdom, and goodness, which puts our hearts at rest respecting the most important concerns of the creation. Our own interests, temporal and eternal, we commit, cheerfully and entirely, to his care. We trust in him for all that is necessary to purify our hearts, to guide and protect us during our pilgrimage, to comfort us in affliction, and to give us peace and triumph in the prospect of death. And when the time of our departure draws near, we hope to look up to our merciful, condescending Redeemer, and, with that confidence in his infinite grace, which quells every fear, to say, "*Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit.*" — Does the Unitarian system teach any thing like this? Does such a faith spring from the principles, which it inculcates?

5. *Dread of sin, and watchful care to obey the divine precepts.*

The importance of the doctrine of rewards and punishments is insisted on by Unitarians, as well as by the Orthodox. The question is, does their scheme, or ours, exhibit the doctrine in the form best adapted to impress

men with a dread of sin, and excite them to obey the divine precepts? Now I think it must be obvious to those, who are acquainted with the most respectable authors on both sides, that the heaven which we are taught by our system to contemplate, is a state of higher perfection, and of purer and more elevated enjoyment, than that, which our opponents describe. Unitarian authors represent the future condition of Christians, as being much less removed from their present condition, than what we suppose to be fact. Accordingly they look upon us, in relation to this subject, as overstepping the bounds of sober truth, and attempting to set off the joys of heaven with too high colors. Read what they have written on this subject, and you will be satisfied, that the views they exhibit of the heavenly felicity, are less adapted to excite a deep interest in the mind of man, and less adapted to sway his active powers, than those which are exhibited by the best writers on the other side. If this is in fact so, then, whatever may be said as to reason and argument in the case, the Orthodox system has certainly the advantage, as to *moral influence*. For the contemplation of a future reward, to be obtained by virtuous efforts, must evidently tend to excite those efforts, very much in proportion to the greatness and excellence of that reward.

If any hesitate to admit what I have advanced on this part of the subject, I will not stop to contest the point, but pass to the consideration of *future punishment*, on which our reasoning can be attended with no difficulty. Here my first inquiry is,—does the threat of punishment tend to deter men from sin? Is the penalty of any law, divine or human, fitted to have an influence to prevent transgression? If so, it must be by moving the passion of *fear*. The evil threatened is addressed to this passion,

and can produce an effect upon no other principle of action. The next question is, whether the prospect of an evil, that is great and insupportable, has a tendency to excite a *stronger* sensation of fear, than the prospect of an evil, comparatively small and easily endured? I appeal to common sense. I appeal to common practice. When legislators find, that the penalty of any law does not work upon the fears of men powerfully enough to prevent the commission of crimes, they increase its severity. And this they do upon the general principle, that the penalty of a law will be likely to awaken the fears of men, and influence their conduct, other things being equal, very much in proportion to the greatness of the evil, involved in that penalty. Upon this obvious principle, I wish you to examine the practical tendency of our doctrine respecting future punishment. We believe that the future punishment of the wicked will be *inexpressibly great*, and will *endure forever*. We bring that great and endless punishment into view, in order to illustrate the evil of sin, and the displeasure of God against it. We believe that such a punishment is just; that it is no more than commensurate with the ill-desert of sin; and that it shows no more displeasure against sin, than is necessarily prompted by the perfect love which the King Eternal feels for the welfare of his kingdom. Now will not any man be powerfully held back from the commission of sin, by the serious apprehension, that it is a great evil, that God is greatly displeased with it, that it tends to produce extensive injury to the creation, and that it will be followed with inexpressible and hopeless misery? If you would weaken the power, which hinders a man from sin, weaken his apprehension of the greatness of the evil of it; weaken his apprehension of the displeasure of God against it, and of

the dreadfulnes and the duration of the misery to which it will lead. Now is not this what the system of Unitarians actually does, so far as it opposes the views of the Orthodox respecting future punishment? I have nothing to say here, as to the arguments used on one side or the other. I speak simply, as to *practical tendency*. And I am not anxious what conclusions any man will adopt, who will allow himself, on rational principles, soberly to investigate the two systems under consideration.

I might say, were it necessary, that the powerful influence of the doctrine of future punishment, as we hold it, is illustrated by numberless facts. Men strongly inclined or tempted to sin, have been deterred from the commission of it, by the fear of endless punishment. By the same fear, many have been roused from spiritual lethargy, and excited to make that most important inquiry, "what shall we do to be saved?" How many have been excited by this doctrine, to such reflections as these;—"is that sin, which I indulge in my heart, so great an evil in the sight of a just and benevolent God, that he has threatened everlasting punishment, as its recompense? Am I, while impenitent, exposed to that recompense? And shall I, by the momentary pleasures of sin, bring hopeless ruin upon my immortal soul?"—Such reflections as these, naturally occasioned by the doctrine of endless punishment, have, in instances too many to be enumerated, led, through the mercy of God, to a thorough reformation of character.

6. *Reverence for the word of God.* The grand maxim of the Polish Socinians was, that *reason is our ultimate rule and standard*, and that whatever in religion is not conformed to this, is to be rejected. This maxim, as they understood it, gave them perfect liberty to alter or set aside the obvious sense of the Bible, whenever it

did not agree with the deductions of reason. Unitarians in general have, with more or less decision, adopted the same maxim. I do not say, that all, who are called Unitarians in New England, treat the word of God with the same irreverent license, which some English and German Unitarians have shown. But I think no candid and competent judge can doubt, that the *general aspect* of Unitarianism does less honor to revelation, than the contrary system. Unitarianism bows with less veneration to the word of God, and receives its instructions with a less implicit confidence. It has lower views of the nature and degree of that inspiration, which the writers of Scripture enjoyed, and is proportionably less inclined to receive their word, as infallible. In forming our opinions, we inquire simply, *what saith the Scripture? and what was the sense, which the inspired writers meant to convey?* When we learn this, we are satisfied. Our reason receives its doctrines from the word of God. It sees the objects of religion, not in its own light, but in a light borrowed from revelation. As soon as our reason discovers what God teaches, we suffer it to go no farther. The Bible, we believe, contains a harmonious system of truth, eternal truth, unmixed with error. If our reason seems to see inconsistencies, we charge not the appearance of those inconsistencies to any fault in the Scriptures, but to the weakness and obscurity of reason, and we have no doubt it will entirely vanish, when our reason acquires a higher degree of improvement. I must refer it to the christian public to determine, whether Unitarianism teaches its disciples to treat the word of God with this kind of reverence and submission.

Our system gives us liberty to pass over no part of Scripture, as unworthy of regard. What is said on one part of a subject, we charge ourselves to receive with as

much confidence, as what is said on another part ; and what is opposed to our prepossessions, as readily, as what is agreeable to them. I might show this to be our practice, with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, the moral corruption of man, the divine purposes, and the divine agency. But, in my apprehension, the Unitarian theory is so constructed, as to set aside one part of Scripture entirely. That is to say, the faith of Unitarians, certainly of that class of them, who believe in the simple humanity of Christ, is the same, as it would be, if those texts, which ascribe the highest perfections to Christ, were expunged from the Bible. There are texts, which assert that the Word was God,—that all things were made by him and for him,—that he is over all, God blessed forever. But these texts, and others of similar import, make no alteration in the faith of Socinians. Their opinions are founded on other representations of the Scriptures *exclusively*. These texts have no influence at all upon them. The Orthodox have a belief in the inspiration and authority of the Bible, which prevents them from treating any part of it in this manner. If the Bible teaches, that Christ is a man, they believe he is a man. If the Bible teaches, that he is divine, they believe he is divine. If it teaches, that he created all things, they believe it. If it teaches, that he prayed to the Father, that he suffered, and died, and rose from the dead, they receive all this as a matter of fact. So of the rest. Whatever the Bible declares respecting Christ, they regard as infallible truth. They extend the limits of their faith far enough to comprise all parts of the testimony of God. They do not come to the Bible with such a bias of mind, that, if they believe Christ to be *man*, they will believe this *only*, and whatever the Bible may say, will not believe that he is

also *God*; or that, if they believe the divine *unity*, they will believe this *only*, and whatever the Bible may say, will not believe a divine Trinity. They have such liberality of faith, that, on the simple authority of God's word, they will believe both. I mention this merely to show, that their system, or their habit of thinking, leads them to entertain so profound a reverence for the Bible, that, as soon as they know what it declares, they are satisfied. They suffer not their reason to set itself up, and claim authority, as a teacher, or guide; but require it to submit to the authority of Revelation, and to exercise itself only to receive instruction from God, with the humble docility of a child. Now even admitting, that the system of the Orthodox contains a mixture of error, it is very apparent, that they have made it what it is, from sincere reverence for the word of God. *The high authority and infallible truth* of the Scriptures, is the principle, which controls their reasoning and their faith.

I could extend these remarks, and show, that on the subject of man's moral depravity, the atonement, regeneration, and other controverted points, the reasoning of Unitarians manifests less reverence for the word of God, than that of their opponents. I could illustrate this, as before, by the simple fact, that there are many passages of the Bible, which the writers seem to have thought very important, which yet are of no account with Unitarians, and have no influence whatever upon their faith. It would be easy for Unitarians themselves, by a little inquiry, to perceive, that their faith would be just what it now is, were the texts referred to, erased from the sacred pages. All the effect, produced upon their minds by any one of those texts, is, to occasion them perplexity and trouble, and to put them to the wearisome labor of

explaining away its obvious sense, and making it appear consistent with their views.

I might cite many observations of English and German Unitarians, expressive of their low ideas of inspiration, and their want of reverence for the word of God. But I intended merely to direct the eye of the reader to what seems to me exceedingly obvious, and lead him to inquire, whether the *general aspect* of the system embraced by Unitarians, and the general style of their reasoning on religious subjects, is not indicative of less reverence for the sacred oracles, than what is manifested by the Orthodox. But whether the result of a comparison be or be not the same in their minds, as it is in mine ; the uniform declarations and conduct of the Orthodox, and the general character of their writings, will, I hope, leave no man in doubt, as to the reverence which they entertain for the word of God, or as to the tendency of their system of religion to promote such reverence.

7. Let us finally consider the subject, in relation to *benevolent action*, particularly that highest kind of it, which is directed to *the spread of the gospel, and the salvation of men*.

The views, which our religious system exhibits of the eternal love of God, and especially of the condescension and grace of Jesus Christ, have a manifest tendency to beget the sincerest and most active kindness towards mankind. Under the influence of such examples of goodness, as we are taught to contemplate in the providence of God, and in the life of Jesus, we cannot be indifferent to the wants, or the sufferings of our fellow creatures.

But the grand influence of Orthodoxy relates directly to the spiritual and eternal condition of men. We



believe,—and it is a distinguishing mark of our religion,—that the world lieth in wickedness ; that all men are the subjects of a total alienation of heart from God, and justly exposed to everlasting punishment. This view of mankind, especially when we look upon ourselves as partners with them in the same guilt and ruin, must produce the tenderest emotions of sympathy. And when with a temper of mind, which is in any measure what it ought to be, we consider their moral degradation and misery in connexion with that grace of God, which has provided salvation ; how deeply must we be affected ; and how powerfully must we be stirred up to benevolent exertion in their behalf. Look abroad into various quarters of the world, where mankind are in a state of the profoundest ignorance and wretchedness, and see the efforts which are made for their reformation, and their happiness. Then look into Christian nations, and see, who are the most active in promoting these benevolent efforts. See what is the spring of all these remarkable movements, which really present the only prospect we have, of the salvation of the world. What is it that rouses the exertions of those, who are giving their substance or offering their prayers, or of those, who are exposing themselves to hardships, and suffering and death, in the cause of human happiness ? 'Tis simply this. They see that the children of men have destroyed themselves ; that their immortal souls are ready to perish. This touches the pity of their hearts, and kindles all the fervor of benevolent desire. They see that a Savior is provided, and that self-ruined sinners may obtain eternal life. This awakens their hope, their zeal, and their efforts. The reason they have to expect, that the grace of God will abound in the salvation of sinners, gives them alacrity and patience in their labors. If souls,

precious as their own, and equally the objects of the mercy which the gospel proffers, may obtain the salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory; they have a reward like that, which Jesus himself enjoys, when he sees the travail of his soul, and is satisfied. I say then, that the doctrine of the utter ruin of man, and of the grace of God which bringeth salvation, is the spring of those animated exertions for the good of the world, which mark the present era.

To try the natural tendency of the doctrine of man's depravity, and his redemption by Christ, as we hold it, I will suppose the following case.—There is a certain Unitarian, who, though a very benevolent man, yet, with his present views of religion, makes no particular exertions, by the contribution of money, or by personal labors, for the conversion of sinners, either at home, or abroad. He is content that men in Christian and in heathen lands should remain as they are, except what may be done for them by the gradual progress of knowledge, and the arts of civilized life. But this same Unitarian alters his religious opinions, and becomes well satisfied, that mankind are, every where, in that very state of moral corruption and ruin, which the Orthodox system asserts, and that just such a salvation is provided, and may be obtained in just such a way, as that system teaches. Of this he becomes deeply convinced. What will be the consequence? Will not his heart be touched with compassion for sinners? Will he not long to see the grace of God displayed in their conversion? Will he not join himself to the company of those, who are laboring and praying and giving of their substance, for the salvation of those, who are perishing? Is not this the natural consequence of such a change in his religious views? Do not facts, as well as the nature of the case, show it to be so?

Now invert the supposition.—A man, who feelingly embraces the common Orthodox system, and who is led, by his views of the ruined, miserable condition of the human race, to unite with those, who show the highest degree of zeal in promoting the conversion of sinners at home, and in sending the gospel to the heathen ;—such a man changes his faith, and comes to entertain the views of Unitarians, respecting the state and the prospects of human beings. Is not his zeal for the conversion of sinners, and for evangelizing the heathen, extinguished? And does he not forsake the society of those, who are active in promoting the benevolent enterprises of this auspicious day? Do not facts, as well as the nature of the case, show this to be the natural consequence of such a change in his opinions?—Unitarians, as it seems to me, act with perfect self-consistency on this subject. Their opinions and their practice correspond; and with the sentiments they now indulge respecting the nature of the gospel, and the character and condition of man, what powerful motives can they have to labor, or make sacrifices for the conversion of sinners? Have we any reason to expect, that Unitarians will so far imitate the holy Apostles, as to become preachers of the gospel among the heathen, and to be willing to spend and be spent, to suffer persecution, and to die, in the cause of human salvation? Possibly they may be accessible to the influence of motives, which we have not duly considered. If we are chargeable with a mistake, or with ignorance, on this subject, or if we indulge views, which can be considered, as in any measure unjust or injurious, we must refer to the writings and the conduct of Unitarians, as our apology. What exertions have they made to promote the spread of the gospel in pagan lands? What heathen tribes or nations are now receiving the words of eternal life from their missionaries, or experiencing, in

other ways, the salutary effects of their religious charities, and their prayers?—For myself, I know not how it is, that any, who have a heart to feel for the woes, or to desire the eternal happiness of man, can be indifferent to the benevolent operations of this day, in behalf of those who are destitute of the gospel. But are not Unitarians, generally, chargeable with this indifference? Are they not chargeable with more than indifference? Instead of uniting with the multitude of good men, who devote themselves to works of Christian benevolence; do they not look with pity or contempt, upon the most fervent prayers, and the most earnest, faithful, and successful labors of the church of Christ, in the cause of human salvation? And is not all this a dark and forbidding characteristic of their system?

The views I have expressed, as to the practical tendency of Orthodoxy and of Unitarianism, are such, I apprehend, as must result from a due consideration of the character of these two systems.—I am aware it may be difficult for those, whose minds have strong prepossessions against Orthodoxy, to conceive that it should produce such effects, as I have ascribed to it. But certainly such effects do naturally result from it, as it is understood and embraced by the Orthodox. Such must be my apprehension, till some one shall take the doctrines of Orthodoxy, just as *we* hold them, not as represented by our opponents, and make out, by fair reasoning, that they have an opposite tendency.

I intended to proceed farther under this general head, and to consider the tendency of our religious system, compared with the opposite one, to promote a spirit of humility, and of prayer. But it will be perfectly easy for the reader to apply to each of these subjects the principles, which have been applied to the other subjects, treated in this Letter.

I shall now finish what I have to say on the important subject of *practical influence*, by one remark ; namely ; that the advantage, which the Author of the Sermon has, in setting forth the practical influence of Unitarianism, is derived, almost entirely, from those views of religion, which really belong to the Orthodox. These, generally, are the views, which he makes prominent in his Discourse, and by which he gives plausibility to his system. I leave the propriety of this mode of treating the subject, to the consideration of others.—To those of my readers, who understand thoroughly what the Unitarian scheme is, I must also refer the decision of another question ; that is ; whether this Author has not, in some instances, been silent respecting certain opinions, which are common among Unitarians, when the importance of those opinions, as well as the express design of his Sermon, required him to speak of them without reserve. If, on every important topic, he has been perfectly explicit in giving *his own* views ; it must be that he differs very widely in opinion from the generality of Unitarians. And if so, then I should doubt, whether some man, who was of the same mind with them, might not have been more properly employed, as their agent and representative before the public. Though he may have given a true and unreserved account of his own religious faith, I cannot think he has given a just account of the general faith of those, for whom he undertakes to speak. Thus in my apprehension, he fails essentially as to both systems. As to Orthodoxy, he does not show a feature of it in its true light. What he has written would enable no man on earth correctly to understand any one article of our faith. As to Unitarianism,—I think he has as really failed of giving a just and complete account of it, though not in the same way, nor in an equal degree.

Although I have, in these Letters, spoken frequently of the injustice, which the Orthodox have been accustomed to suffer from their opposers, I would not have you imagine that I have meant to complain of any *personal* injuries, or wished to excite feelings of commiseration towards the Orthodox. I have complained of injustice in the treatment, which our religious faith has received from our opponents, because it tends to bar their minds and the minds of others, against the most salutary truths, and to perpetuate the evils of controversy.

I am conscious of no disposition and of no temptation, to reproach or injure those, whom I have here addressed. On the contrary, I have strong inducements to respect and honor them,—especially those of them, who were among my beloved Instructors and fellow students at the University, and many others, to whom I have particular personal attachments. But I have wished to cherish the influence of still higher motives, toward those, from whose religious opinions I dissent. I would regard them, as fellow creatures, whom God requires me to love, as I love myself,—who are destined to the same immortal existence, and capable of the same immortal joys with myself,—who are to appear, a few days hence, before the same high and holy tribunal, and whose final sentence is to come from the lips of the same infallible Judge. Under the influence of these considerations, suffer me to say, I have found it easy, not only to guard my mind against every feeling of animosity, but to exercise love and tenderness. In executing the business, which I am now closing, I have charged myself, first, to do as much as possible, to promote the cause of Christ; and then, as little as possible, to inflict a wound upon the feelings of my opponents. Indeed I have written with the desire and the hope of contributing, through divine mercy, to their eternal welfare.—I have also endeav-

ored to keep in mind, that the feelings, which are apt to agitate the minds of contending parties, will shortly vanish, and that the controversy, which has made its way into New England, and the conduct of all those, who take a part in it, must be subjected to review, before Him, who cannot err.

And now, my respected friends, I desire freely and affectionately to inquire, what Unitarians expect to gain, by the efforts they are making in their pamphlets, periodical publications, and sermons, to disseminate the peculiarities of their religious system? Do they expect that Unitarianism will have a more powerful influence to promote good morals in society, or that it will produce better men, or better civil and literary institutions, than that religion, which brought our forefathers to New England, and which has given to all our institutions, to our ministers and churches, to our rulers, and to our community at large, a character of preeminence, which has been universally seen and acknowledged among us? As to this subject of practical influence, our system most evidently possesses every thing which is valuable in that of Unitarians. Whatever motives to goodness can be drawn from the "paternal character of God," or from any of his moral attributes, from the "loveliness and sublimity of virtue," from the example of Christ, from the precepts of the Gospel, or from the doctrine of a resurrection, and a future state of retribution; our system inculcates them at least as forcibly, and turns them to as good account, as that of our opponents. And our system has much in addition, which we consider of infinite worth, but of which theirs is wholly destitute. I ask then, what they expect to gain by the efforts they are making,—which are, in reality, efforts to diffuse among men, lower conceptions of the glory of Christ, and of the honor due to him from his people,—lower conceptions